

THE VICTORY BOY SCOUTS

STORM-BOUND



AVACATION AMONG
THE SNOW DRIFTS

THE VICTORY BOY SCOUTS

BY
CAPTAIN ALAN DOUGLAS
SCOUTMASTER

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STORM-BOUND

OR

A VACATION AMONG THE SNOW DRIFTS



IT SEEMED AN IDEAL SNUG RETREAT

STORM-BOUND;

or,

A Vacation Among the Snowdrifts

BY

CAPTAIN ALAN DOUGLAS

SCOUT MASTER



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STORM-BOUND

OR A VACATION AMONG THE SNOW DRIFTS

CHAPTER I

ON THE WRONG TRACK

"ELMER, do you believe we're really on the right track, or have we lost our bearings in this everlasting snow forest?"

"Ask me something easy, please, Lil Artha!"

"Well, I didn't like the looks of that sassy kid who was so eager to have you make a map from what he told us."

"Struck me he grinned too much, boys, as sure as my name's George Robbins. I'm beginning to smell a rat, and think he played a low-down trick on us."

"That is, George, you mean he purposely gave us the wrong directions, and that instead of heading straight for the winter cabin of Toby's jolly Uncle Caleb we're away off our base?"

"Looks like it to me, that's all I've got to say," muttered the boy who had called himself George, at the same time glancing apprehensively at the snow-clad woods surrounding them on all sides.

"Me too!" added the fourth member of the little heavily-laden party, and whose good-natured

face usually screwed itself up in an odd series of wrinkles whenever he spoke with such an effort.

"Well," remarked the boy called Elmer, whose last name was Chenowith, and upon whose decisions the others seemed to depend considerably, as though he might be a leader among them; "let's rest up a bit here, and look the matter squarely in the face. Perhaps we can figure out where we've gone wrong, and start on a new course."

These four well-grown lads were all dressed in the well-known khaki suits that designate Boy Scouts the wide world over. Of course they wore heavy woolen sweaters in addition, for the time was just after Christmas, and Old Winter had taken a notion to set in unusually early that year.

They belonged to the Hickory Ridge Troop of Boy Scouts, which lively town was situated many miles to the south of the place where we discover the quartette up against a puzzling question.

Toby Jones had an old uncle who was not only a scientific man, but who loved the Great Outdoors so much that of late he had come to spend most of his time at his lonely cabin in the forest. Here in the summer he studied, and experimented to his heart's content; while during the winter he set traps, and took wonderful photographs of the snowbound woods, as well as of the fur-bearing little animals that made their homes there.

The idea had struck Toby that with some of his best chums he surprise this jolly Uncle Caleb, who

was a well-known professor among scientists. Many times the boy had received a warm invitation to run up and visit the old gentleman, as well as fetch a friend or two along, but until this winter Toby had somehow never entertained the idea of doing so.

Once it took hold of him, and he became wildly enthusiastic over it. When he mentioned the scheme to Elmer, as well as two other scouts, they fell in with it so quickly that the plans were soon arranged.

Accordingly, immediately after Christmas the four lads had taken a train for the north, and about noon dropped off at a lonely station, where the operator was a new hand, and had never even heard of Uncle Caleb, so that the boys hardly knew which way to turn. Just then they happened to run across a lanky boy with a grinning face, whom Elmer "pumped," with the result that they were directed to follow certain landmarks, turn ever so many times until they came to a frozen creek, up which if they headed a mile they would discover the cabin they sought.

They had been following that same frozen stream more than two hours, and there was not the slightest sign of anything in the way of a shack or cabin. In fact, it looked as though they had managed to tramp into the very heart of what seemed to be a trackless forest. In every direction stretched that never ending array of tall and little trees, each snow splashed; for there were several inches of the white feathery covering on

the ground, what Elmer called fine "tracking snow;" if only they had been hunting game instead of a shelter.

Though all of the scouts kept constantly on the alert they had failed to detect the first sign of human presence. Not a shout or a gunshot had they heard; in vain had they searched the snowy ground for the welcome trail of a trapper going to or coming home after visiting his line of snares.

No wonder then that some of the boys had begun to believe they were tricked by that glib-tongued native lad, who had chuckled so disagreeably as he accepted the silver quarter Elmer thrust in his grimy palm.

All of them bore heavy loads. For the most part these consisted of extra clothes of course for use in case of extreme cold weather; but two of them also carried guns; and Toby had strapped on his pack a pair of snow-shoes his uncle had once presented to him, but which the boy had never found a good chance to use, though he hoped the time had now arrived for putting them to some service.

"I've been trying to figure things out," Elmer told them, as they sat down on a log to rest, while trying to decide which way they should turn; "and while I'm liable to be mistaken just as much as anybody else, I really think we'd have a better chance to find that cabin, or run across some sign of Toby's uncle, if we quit following this creek bed, and turned sharply to the right."

Now Elmer was not only the leader of the Wolf

Patrol when at home, but had long ago qualified for the position of assistant scout master of the troop. When the regular scout master, a young man named Mr. Roderic Garrabrant, chanced to be absent, which frequently happened, the boys looked to Elmer to guide and direct them.

Consequently the three who were now in his company had come to look for great things from their chum; and Elmer often found it a difficult task to satisfy their expectations. And so it was he had in the start given them to understand that he could make mistakes as well as the next one, and they must not think him infallible.

As usual everybody seemed ready to fall in with his suggestion but George, who had a contrary streak in his make-up, and was always ready with objections and questions and serious shakings of the head. They called him "Doubting George," but grown people would long ago have dubbed him a pessimist, because he was always seeing the gloomy side of things, and wanting to be doubly convinced.

"But it seems to me," he started to say, "that we may be jumping out of the fryingpan into the fire if we do that. How do we know the cabin lies to the right?"

"We don't," replied Elmer, without manifesting any feeling over his opinion being questioned, for he knew George of old, and in fact would have been considerably surprised if the other had not put up what Toby called a "kick."

"Would you like to direct us, George?" asked

the tall scout, whose name was Arthur Stansbury, but whom his schoolmates had in a spirit of fun long ago dubbed "Lil Artha," which ridiculous nick-name clung to him like a leech to this day, although he was fully a head above any of the other fellows.

"Oh! excuse me from taking that responsibility on my shoulders," George hastened to say, looking almost alarmed; "if I did, and happened to guess wrong, I'd never hear the end of it."

"So you admit that it'd have to be a *guess*, do you?" pursued Lil Artha mercilessly; "well, on the part of Elmer he's tried to reason the old thing out, and both Toby'n me feel that we can't do better than try what he says. I only hope the walking's better than it's been along this frozen creek, where the ice is too slippery for us to make use of the same. Why didn't we think to fetch our skates along?"

"I did think of it," Toby told him; "but it meant more weight to our packs; and then from what Uncle Caleb's told me about the lay of the country up here, I couldn't figure out how we'd find any use for skates where there was only swamp, marsh, and mebbe a few little crooked creeks nearly always covered with a foot of snow. So I fetched these bully snow-shoes instead. Don't I hope I'll have a chance to skim over the snow on the same, if we're lucky enough to get a heavy fall while up here."

"Perhaps we may get a storm before we're ready for it," observed Elmer drily, as he shot a

dubious glance up at the gray sky that had such an ominous look.

Lil Artha jumped to his feet, showing signs of some excitement.

"Hey! let's be on the hike, fellows!" he exclaimed; "if a storm dropped on top of us right now it wouldn't do a thing to us, p'raps. We haven't got only enough grub for a single day. I guess matches are about the only thing we're heavy on, because we expected to eat our meals in Uncle Caleb's cabin most of the time."

"Well, matches are good things to have up here in the snow woods," remarked Elmer, who was an exact contrast to George in that he always saw the silver lining of the cloud, whereas the other scout could not get beyond the pall.

"You bet they are," Lil Artha went on to say, as he shouldered his pack, which he had arranged in regular Adirondack fashion, with a band across his forehead to assist in sustaining the weight; "though for that matter, if we went shy of the same I reckon you could depend on me to get fire by making a little bow, and sawing the same on a pointed stick, South Sea Islander way. I've done it more'n once, though I never seem able to depend on my cunning. Something goes wrong so often; or else I'm in too big a hurry, and spoil everything. But if you're ready lead off, Elmer. We'll trip along in your tracks, and keep it up for another hour anyway. That rest did us all a heap of good."

The four scouts kept pushing on steadily.

Elmer in the van continued to maintain a bright lookout for any sign of footprints in the snow that would give them encouragement, though as time passed, and he failed to find any such, the rosy hopes with which they had started began to gradually fade away.

Of course the others also kept their eyes about them, in hopes of sighting a lone cabin, or discovering smoke rising amidst the trees. Hope died hard, and only George grumbled when more than half an hour had crept on without their running upon the first sign that would mean success.

Once Elmer had pointed out to them the tracks of a fox, and of course being true scouts, they were all greatly interested in examining the trail, and speculating on whether it had been of the ordinary red variety, or a gray animal, perhaps one of those silver-black foxes, the pelt of which is often valued at as much as fifteen hundred dollars.

Elmer had settled this question by picking up a hair he found caught on the split end of a branch that grew low down, and which the body of the fox, as well as his brushy tail, must have scraped as he slipped past. It was plainly a red hair, and even George could not find any cause for disputing that evidence, though he was far from happy, and in a fit mood for argument if the occasion arose.

Several other times Elmer pointed to the unmistakable track of a bounding rabbit, and had they had more time, at their disposal the boys

would have liked nothing better than to follow these, so as to figure out what was chasing bunny to induce him to take such enormous jumps. But the fact of their being astray in that unknown forest, with night not far away, and a heavy snow-storm brooding over them, rather discouraged them from turning aside from the main thing that engaged their attention, which of course was the finding of the trapper's cabin.

Nobody paid the least attention to George when they heard him grunting away in the rear, because George would not have been happy unless he was miserable, strange though that may sound. There is generally a boy built after that fashion in every crowd of scouts. As a rule he has some good qualities that make his friends forgive his bad ones, and finally they get so accustomed to his grumblings that they pay little attention to them. In fact George's complainings had little more effect on his boon companions than so much water poured on a duck's back would. It amused him to grunt and object, and hurt them very little, so what was the sense of making any trouble?

Another fifteen minutes crept along. There did not seem to be any particular change in things, except that the light was showing signs of failing, and perhaps George stumbled more frequently, for he was not as spry on his feet when carrying a pack as the other fellows.

"Don't seem to be over this way either, Elmer," suggested Lil Artha, finally.

"That's right, Uncle Caleb's cabin appears to

be as hard to locate as a needle in a haystack," admitted the leader of the Wolf Patrol, cheerily; as though it would have to be something more than this to discourage him, because he had made it his business in life to always look at the bright side of things; and knew that no matter how gloomy the prospect might be it could seem much worse.

"That settles it!" came abruptly from George in the rear.

"What's the matter with you back there; stubbed your toe again? We'll have to make a scout litter and carry you the rest of the way, if you keep on falling over every old log there is," Lil Artha told him, severely.

"'Tain't that this time, mind you," the delinquent one answered back, with a triumphant grin; "but what's the use trying to poke along any further? Might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, any day. This place looks like it'd make a good camp for to-night."

"Camp?" echoed Toby.

"Sure thing!" snapped George. "We're all tuckered out, and as hungry as wolves in the dead of winter; night's comin' on right fast; and then if you take a look you'll see that it's begun to snow!" and as the others did glance hastily up they discovered the first few big flakes commence to sail lazily down!

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE PLACE TO CAMP

"I'M surprised at you saying it's going to snow, George," Lil Artha remarked, as he turned on the doubting scout; "because it'd be more like you to tell us ten flakes didn't make a storm, and that anyway there was always a chance of it giving us the go-by. Guess you're tired, and want to snuggle down close to a warm fire, which would explain why you give in so easy-like."

"Just as you please, so long as we do camp," replied the other, as he began to undo the straps that secured his hamper to his back.

"Keep still, fellows!" said Elmer, in a husky whisper; "I honestly believe I saw a bevy of partridges fly up in a tree over yonder," and as he dropped his pack lightly to the ground, he gripped the trusty little twelve-bore Marlin double-barreled shot-gun which he had owned for a number of years, and occasionally found a use for.

"Oh! partridges, fat partridges, and me as hungry as a bear!" gasped Toby; but Elmer had already quitted his chums, and was making his way toward the point he had indicated with his hand.

They watched him with considerable eagerness, and waited to see what luck attended his stalking action.

"Since it looks like we'd have to spend a night here, like the Babes in the Wood," Lil Artha was saying in a whisper, "it'd be real nice if Elmer could only bag four plump birds for our supper! Let's hope he gets a string of the same in range, and makes a double with each shot."

"Honest Injun! I think I could devour four myself, without half trying," Toby assured them, rubbing the pit of his stomach as though to call their attention to the fact that it was an aching void.

"Huh! you mightn't even get the smell of a single one cooking," George warned him; "because I've been told partridges are wary old birds, even up here, where they light in the trees after being flushed, instead of going off with a whirr of their wings, like they do down our way."

"There, he's going to let drive!" said Lil Artha, who, being something of a hunter himself, had been closely observing the progress of Elmer all this time.

"Good luck to his pot-shot!" muttered Toby.

Two reports were heard in quick succession. Then Elmer was seen to hastily run forward, at the same time managing to reload his gun.

"He got one, anyhow!" cried Toby, exultantly; "that fixes *me* all right. There, he has grabbed another up off the ground. Bully for Elmer! He knows how to work the game, all right. What!

another bird? Oh! George, if only he had killed four you might have had one, the same as the rest of us!"

"Well, I like your nerve," said George, indignantly; "why should I be singled out to get left, tell me that, Toby?"

"Keep quiet, George, and don't get riled so easy," Lil Artha told him, "because, as sure as you live he's hurrying over to pick a fourth bird up. What d'ye think of that for great luck, now? Four hungry scouts, and a fat partridge for each. I think it's a splendid introduction to Uncle Caleb's pet game preserve, don't you all?"

"He must have knocked over three with that right barrel," ventured Toby; "like as not they were all sitting along a limb when he fired, and then he picked that last one when they were on the wing, remembering that George would have to go hungry, or only suck the racks, if he didn't get another."

When Elmer rejoined them he was wearing a smile of contentment such as usually adorns the face of a successful sportsman.

"Couldn't have been better any way you fixed it, fellows," he told them. "There they sat, in a row, and you never saw a prettier sight. I just hated to do such a thing, but even scouts can be forgiven for shooting game when they're adrift in an unknown snow forest, and hungry in the bargain."

"I should say they could," Lil Artha added, forcibly, "and lots of other times in the bargain."

But these birds are as plump as any I've ever seen. Just feel of the fat breasts, will you? Makes my mouth water, thinking how fine they'll go with our coffee and crackers. How fortunate we thought to bring a few things along in case Uncle Caleb might run short on rations. Plenty of coffee, a little tea, some sugar, a can of condensed milk, crackers, cheese, a pound of bacon, and a package of self-raising flour for flapjacks. We ought to subsist for a whole day on that bill of fare, don't you think?"

"And as we've got our guns along," interposed Lil Artha, "with more or less of game around us, what's the use of worrying? For one I'm meaning to take things as they come, and squeeze what fun I can out of the same."

"That's the stuff!" said Toby, and Elmer nodded his approval; only skeptical George remained silent, for he was feeling of his partridge and with a frown on his brow that made Toby hasten to assure him the bird was a real one, and not such as he may have seen in his dreams.

Already Elmer was casting about to see where they had better locate their camp. It was easy to say this would be for only one night, but how did they know? The threatening storm might swoop down with such force that it would virtually imprison them for a much longer stay. And so he considered it worth while to do the best possible while they had any choice of situation.

Elmer had had considerable experience, having spent a year up on a Canadian cattle ranch and

wheat farm owned by an uncle, Elmer's father having been given charge of the property. There the boy had learned dozens of things that were apt to prove valuable to any one in the woods. Besides, he had made it a practice to pick up information wherever he went by asking questions, investigating for himself, and constantly increasing his stock of knowledge.

Looking in every quarter he presently decided that since they carried no tent, and it would be no easy task to make a brush shelter, their best move was to settle down in the lee of one of those cavities formed when a hurricane had toppled a number of giant trees over, with their roots, and the earth attached to the same, standing fully eight feet in the air.

There was a little choice about the matter, and Elmer picked out the one best suited to screen them from the northwest wind. The snow would surely come from that direction, and having a windbreak might mean considerable.

"Drōp everything here, boys, and let's hustle to collect all the wood we can find. Don't stop short of darkness, because maybe we'll have to keep a fire going for several days. Just drag it handy, so we'll know where to find it, even if the snow comes two feet deep!"

"Whew! I sure hope it don't get us that way to start with," said Toby; "and us not knowing whether Uncle Caleb's shack is to the north, east or west. Don't I wish we'd run across him in the woods, and were toasting our shins alongside a

fire in his comfy little place right now! Um! But the snow's coming faster than she was, fellows!"

"The more reason we should get busy," Elmer told him.

At that they started energetically to "make hay while the sun shone," as Lil Artha said, though he must himself have been convinced that the comparison was hardly a good one, judging from the grimace he gave when casting his eyes upward toward the leaden sky that frowned down upon them like a dome.

Fortunately there was no lack of wood handy. This had doubtless been one reason why Elmer had decided on pitching the camp where he did. Those fallen trees had in crashing to the ground broken many large limbs off, and all that was necessary for the campers to do was to drag these, one after another, to a convenient striking distance from the hole in which they intended spending the night.

All around it they banked up the loose wood, until Toby declared they had fully enough to do an army.

"Don't you believe it," said Lil Artha, an authority on fires among his fellow scouts; "you'd be s'prised to see what an enormous amount of wood a fire eats up in a single night; and like as not we may have to hold the fort a week, just as Elmer said. Keep on fetching it a little while longer, boys."

"You're on the safe side there, Lil Artha," the

cautious scout master decided; "we can't have too much burning wood, with that sky threatening us. And to run out, with the snow piled up hip-high over everything wouldn't be the nicest job in the world. Let's work at it for another ten minutes. By then it will be so near dark that we can lay off, and get our camp fixed."

So they labored on industriously until Elmer called a halt. George was a good enough worker, and usually did his share when the necessity arose. His grumbling really sprang more from force of habit than a desire to make himself disagreeable. Sometimes Elmer seriously considered whether it would pay them to try and cure George of his fault-finding, and then as often decided that, given time, it must surely die out. Things of that sort generally thrive on opposition.

To Lil Artha was given over the task of making the fire. It was lucky indeed in this pinch that Elmer had thought to bring his pet camp hatchet along. Though its weight had added to his weariness on the march, he had had what he called a "hunch" that it might come in handy, though hardly expecting to be compelled to fall back on the little tool the first thing in order to supply fuel for a camp.

So the tall scout began to hack at a couple of promising fragments of thick limbs which would make good sides for the cooking fire, and upon which their coffeepot could rest; for they had such a thing along, as well as a skillet, both made of aluminum, and weighing next to nothing.

Elmer, assisted by George and Toby, meanwhile started to see how some sort of shelter could be arranged with the four rubber ponchos which they carried. He knew how soldiers on the march are in the habit of fastening two of these together by means of the grummet holes along the edges, forming a little shelter called a "dog-tent," under which the pair can at least keep the upper halves of their bodies from the rain.

By skillful work they managed to cover the cavity behind the upturned roots of the fallen forest monarch in such a fashion that it would shed most of the snow, even though some might drift through the cracks.

"A pretty good job!" Lil Artha told them, as he suspended operations in connection with his fire, which was by now sending out a grateful warmth, and much good cheer in addition.

"Next thing is to get the birds plucked, and ready for the spit," announced Toby, as he took up the one that had been apportioned to him.

George followed suit, but was evidently a poor hand at stripping the feathers off, to judge by the gingerly way he went at it. Lil Artha had to show him just how to grip hold, and make things fly; but even then George looked anything but happy.

"And I'd feel safe in wagering," said Toby, with a laugh, as he held up his partridge, beautifully cleaned, and ready to be broiled before the fire, after he had split it down the back, "that if we were anywhere near home George would be

willing to spend his last dime in bribing some boy to finish his job; but that don't go here; no work no pay. Those who expect to dine on partridge must prepare the same. You hear me speaking, George. But I don't mind showing you again how I do it, which according to my notion is a better way than Lil Artha has."

And as George, seeing his opportunity, commenced to compliment Toby, and engage his attention, the result was that he got his partridge not only completely denuded down to the last pin-feather, but split along the back in the bargain.

After that a busy scene that glowing, snapping fire saw, with the coffeepot sending out a delightful aroma, and the four hungry boys each holding out his game near the flames, turning it often in order to allow every part to receive an equal share of the intense heat that was browning the outside so beautifully.

Finally Toby gave a groan.

"Can't stand for it any longer, and that's a fact, fellows!" he announced; "please fill my cup with coffee, Elmer, and let me get started or I'll cave in. George, pass that package of crackers, will you; and, Lil Artha, I'd like to sample that cheese if you don't mind!"

"For goodness' sake everybody wait on Toby, and get him shut off, or he'll give us no peace!" exclaimed Lil Artha, though he had already put his own teeth into one half of his sizzling partridge, to find that it was as tender as could be, and perfectly delicious.

In another minute or two all of them were busily engaged. It was such a pleasant duty, partaking of this forest meal, and amidst such romantic surroundings, that for the time being they forgot all the dismal prospects ahead of them, and were quite merry. Toby joked, and Lil Artha laughed aloud, while Elmer joined them, and even George, placated by having his gnawing pains satisfied, for the time being looked contented with the world. He would not have made any objection had he been offered a second edition of that game supper; for when his bird had been reduced to a mere lot of well-picked bones his taste for broiled partridge seemed as keen as ever.

Possessed of hearty boyish appetites it can readily be understood that they had made a pretty good hole in their limited supplies by the time all of them admitted that they were satisfied. Toby professed to be greatly concerned because of this growing scarcity of rations, and as for George, his gloom had returned, since he was already talking of the time, near at hand most likely, when the cupboard would be as bare as it was when Old Mother Hubbard went to get her dog a bone.

"Gee! whiz! look at it coming down, would you!" burst out Lil Artha, as having finished attending to that clamorous appetite, he thought it worth while to take an observation, in order to learn what the weather might be.

"Never saw it snow harder," admitted Toby.

"Be over our heads by morning, see if 'tain't," George prophesied.

“Well, p’raps you may have a chance to use those snow-shoes sooner’n you thought you would, Toby,” ventured Lil Artha, as they all crouched there, staring out at the dark forest, and watching the myriads of big flakes steadily falling, as though a storm of the greatest magnitude had come down from the far northwest, where the weather man keeps this brand of thing in tap for scouts who are incautious enough to be caught napping, away off in a strange woods, and with only rations for one day in their haversacks.

CHAPTER III

THE LONG NIGHT

"LET me tell you this is going to be the queerest old camp any of us ever found ourselves stuck in," Toby ventured to remark, some time later.

"I should say it was," grumbled George, as he rubbed his ears, and then held both hands out toward the fire to warm them again.

"I know one thing we ought to do right away," said Elmer, "and that's get out those warm skating tuques; they'll keep the air off our heads, and can be drawn down to protect our ears."

"That's a good idea, Elmer," Lil Artha told him, "because I don't want to have one of my wigwags frozen off. You see, I'm so much taller than the rest of you it takes harder work for my poor heart to pump warm blood all the way up; and so I'm likely to suffer from cold extremities. Seems like that off ear is frosted right now."

"If it is," cried George, hurriedly, as though he thought Lil Artha meant all he said, "take my advice, and rub it hard with a lot of snow. That'll take the frost out, and start circulation again. Brr! but this is going to be a tough night, when you think of it."

"I don't know," Elmer told him; "seems to me

we've got a whole lot to be thankful for, with this fine fire, and a protection against the storm. Perhaps we may run up against something harder than this before we're done."

"But we haven't got a tent, and our grub is pretty skimpy, say what you will," the grumbler went on to protest.

"Yes, that's all very true," continued Elmer, "but how wise we were to fetch our blankets along, for fear that Toby's uncle mightn't have enough in stock to go around. They felt pretty heavy when we carried them, soldier fashion, around one shoulder, and tied them under the other arm; but here's where they come in dandy."

"Well, believe me, it was the smartest trick we ever did," Lil Artha hastened to comment, "and if we'd only glimpsed this sort of box ahead, so as to lay in three times as much grub, it'd be all right."

"It is all right as it stands," the leader went on to say, "and we'll show how scouts can take things as they come, without making mouths. So let's see how we're going to fix ourselves for the night."

"Guess none of us care much to sit up late, and gabble over the fire," suggested Toby; "though it seems a fellow can't get enough of that heat in him."

"I want to shut out the whole business," affirmed George, in sheer disgust, "and I hope that after my eyes close I won't know a blooming thing till morning."

George was a good sleeper as a rule, and his troubles seldom kept him from getting a fair share of rest. Nor was he like his cousin, Philander Smith, also a member of the Wolf Patrol, and who had been known to walk in his sleep; George, once he snuggled down, with his blanket tucked all around him, was like a regular Indian mummy. The others, knowing this from past experiences, paid little attention to his complaints concerning a disturbed night, because they knew it never had any real basis of fact.

For some little time the four boys busied themselves getting "fixed." George was as hard to suit as any old maid. He found something wrong with every corner of the depression that he tried; here it was a root that jabbed him in the ribs; in another place the point of a big stone made it impossible for him to curl up, and maintain a comfortable attitude.

After he had made the complete round, the others allowing him his choice, he was finally compelled to accept the first position he had tested.

"Now let's hope we've heard the last kick from you, George," Lil Artha told him, severely, after submitting to all this fussing; "I don't see what you've got to complain about after all. Your bones are well covered with a pad, while mine stick out like the joints of a scarecrow. And say, don't you think I'm going to have a tough time of it stowing these long legs of mine away? Chances are they'll push out in the night, and when I wake up again I'll find the lower part of poor Lil Artha

as stiff as a board. Subside, George! Give the rest of us a chance to get settled down. If we all took as long as you did it'd be near morning before we fixed things."

Finally, however, they seemed to have made the best of a bad bargain. Taking Elmer's advice they all kept as close together as possible. In this way perhaps they might not secure a great abundance of decent sleep, but the fact of their being in touch with each other would add to their comfort in the way of warmth.

Elmer, with characteristic generosity, had chosen last, and hence he lay nearer the outside of the shelter than any of his mates. But having known what it was to be exposed to the rigors of a cold storm, since he had braved a Canadian winter while up on that ranch, the young scout master also knew how to make use of his blanket as though it were a sleeping bag.

The hours dragged slowly along.

Afterwards they would always look back, and shudder as they remembered how terribly long that night did seem. And yet none of them really suffered, save that it was impossible to sleep, only in snatches.

This was on account of several things. In the first place, they were jammed together in a way to which they were wholly unaccustomed; and when one stirred on becoming cramped it aroused all the others in turn. Then their strange surroundings had more or less influence upon them. Not that there was any furious noise, such as

would have accompanied a summer gale; but the weird moaning of the wintry wind through the leafless branches of the oaks, and the bending tops of the pines, made a music that kept them thinking they heard human voices calling for help.

Another reason why Elmer had chosen the outside place when lying down was his desire to keep watch upon the fire.

It was his intention to keep this going as long as possible, though a fellow built on the order of George would have complained bitterly had he been compelled to crawl out of his snug nest several times in order to face that pitiless storm, and pile more fuel on the smouldering logs.

Elmer was one of those boys who, knowing his duty, always went about it without any brag or bluster, and could be depended on to sacrifice his own comfort in order that his chums might benefit. In other words Elmer was what you might call an ideal scout. He seldom had any trouble about practicing those twelve cardinal principles that govern the working day of a scout—to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. They came naturally to him.

Three times did he perform this fire-building act. The last occasion must have been well on toward the hour of three in the morning, as he judged from certain conditions, though he could not bother looking at his little silver watch.

At that time the storm was keeping it up just as wildy as ever, and there was much more than a

foot of snow on the ground, where it had not drifted; with any quantity still to come down.

After that Elmer must have secured better sleep, for he did not wake up again until a movement accompanied by a voice aroused him.

"Great Scott! let me tell you the bottom's dropped out of the mercury tube this time, boys!" the voice went on to bellow, and he recognized the tones as belonging to George, who had not been heard from ever since he first curled up in the folds of his warm blanket.

He was raising his head now, and observing his breath as it congealed in the frosty air. Elmer knew that the time to sleep had passed, because it was daylight.

"How about that snow, has it stopped?" asked another voice, as Toby sat up, and began to stretch his arms upon which he may have been lying so that they felt more or less numb.

"Still coming down as hard as ever," Elmer told him, shaking quite a lot of the feathery stuff out of the folds of his blanket; and then struggling to his feet.

There was no lounging around that morning. It was so cold that every fellow was glad to get into action immediately he came out of his blanket. George begged to be allowed to lie there until the fire got good and warm. He urged every plea he could think of, saying they would only get in each others' way by crowding; and that too many cooks always spoiled the broth, anyway; but Toby and Lil Artha declared they had no

use for a shirker; and if he did nothing else he could stand up and serve as a windbreak for the "willing workers."

The fire had gone completely out, and several inches of snow covered the spot; but wise, long-headed Elmer had provided against such a contingency on the evening before, for he had a handful of fine wood, light and dry, handy, with which to make a fresh start.

After things got to moving it was not so bad. The scouts soon felt even a little cheerful over the situation, because a crackling fire is one of the greatest inducements to raising one's spirits ever discovered. When shivering with the cold, and hungry as well, the world looks pretty blue to any one; but let that same person come in close contact with a fire that warms him up, and things quickly take on quite a different hue.

Then there was that fragrant odor of coffee and bacon cooking on the fire that tickled the noses of the boys; nothing could beat that for good cheer—"if only they had more of the same," as George constantly reminded them, even when enjoying his share.

"Strikes me this is a mighty slim breakfast," he remarked, as he found that he had already caused more than half that was on his pannikin to vanish, and yet his appetite seemed as sharp as ever.

"You never spoke truer words, George," said Toby, soberly, "but when you stop to think what a small amount of stuff we've got along with us,

and the bad fix we're in, you can understand that we've got to cut the allowance down."

"Yes," added Lil Artha, "of course you've heard of shipwrecked mariners being in a boat, and drifting around on the big ocean for days and days. Well, they always have to go on half rations, both with food and fresh drinking water. Anyhow we won't have to bother our poor heads about that last, because all we have to do is to melt snow and get what we want."

"Hang it, I wish we could melt all the old white stuff; I hate it!" George continued, being a poor loser.

"And yet I've heard you fairly raving over the beautiful snow," chuckled Lil Artha, "but then that was when you were out sleigh riding with Polly Brett. Makes considerable difference what your condition is, how you look at things. For my part I don't hanker after snow one bit right now. Seen all I want to of it to last me all winter; but then what's the use bothering your head about things that can't be changed. It's a condition, not a theory, that confronts us, and what we want to do is to set our minds to work wrestling with the question of how we're going to crawl out of this difficulty and find Uncle Caleb's shack."

"Whew! mebbe I don't wish we were there now, snug under his roof, and telling him all about our adventure, as well as how Elmer here found a way to pull his chums out of a hole, like he always does," and Toby, while saying this, gave the scout master a sly look, as though begging him to tell

them some hopeful news that would buoy their sinking spirits up.

"I wish I had as much confidence in myself as you seem to feel in me, Toby," was what Elmer told him, "but I couldn't say the storm is nearly over, because it's coming down as hard as ever, and goodness knows when it means to let up. But we're a lively bunch, you know, and we're bound to find some way of getting out of this scrape."

"We've been in others just as tough, remember," Lil Artha declared, "and always did get to the top of the heap in the end."

"That's the way to talk," Elmer continued; "confidence is always one half of the battle. We've proved that on many a hard-fought field, baseball, football and hockey as well. If you can force yourself to believe you will win, the chances are improved three-fold."

"Well," said George, drily, as he stared very hard at his now empty platter, "I'm doing my level best to force myself to believe this pan-kin is heaped high with beefsteak and fried onions and fried potatoes; now if I've got a third of a chance to get what I'm wishing for, even that much would fill a long-felt want. But say, none of you see any grub coming along on my dish do you? Well, wishing don't seem to do any good. I'm as hungry as ever, too, worse luck. Even speaking of such splendid eatings seems to make my mouth water."

"Then stop it!" cried Toby; "think all you

want to, but the rest of us have feelings as well as you, and it's cruelty to animals to even mention such things as—"

"Hold on there! don't you aggravate things by mentioning that list again, or I'll proceed to roll you out of this hole into the snow drifts!" threatened Lil Artha, pretending to make a threatening gesture, while Toby threw up both hands in token of abject surrender.

"I'm dumb as an oyster, Lil Artha," he protested. "I haven't got another word to say; but if there's got to be any ejecting done let's grab the right party, and see that he gets his full dose."

George had meanwhile managed to pick up a couple of extra crackers, and having his mouth full did not make any reply. Lil Artha deftly snatched the box away from him, and closing it, calmly placed it out of reach.

"No hogging, now, George," he went on to say; "share and share alike is the rule we've got to go by from now on. If there's any hungry feeling swinging around, it's going to be no one-sided game. Others can feel empty as well as the Robbins family pet. But let's hope that before another night we'll all be sitting around a table in Uncle Caleb's shack, as warm and cozy as four bugs in a rug."

The mere thought of having to spend a second night amidst those enormous snow drifts gave the boys an unpleasant feeling. They turned and looked out from under their rude shelter. The fire itself was cheery; but beyond this lay the piles

of snow, the grim trees with their white arms extended like monuments in the burying ground at Hickory Ridge, and with the air full of still rapidly falling flakes, as though the weather man up aloft had an unlimited supply of white geese to pluck on this special occasion.

For a short time no one said a word. They were all busy with thoughts, perhaps connected with their happy homes, so far removed; or it might be trying to picture the cheery scene Lil Artha had spoken of when he mentioned that cabin of Uncle Caleb, the man of science, and the small animal photographer and trapper.

CHAPTER IV

SNOW-BOUND

"I DON'T believe there ever was such a furious snow-storm as this before!" Toby remarked, after a while, with a little pensive sigh, as though he had already begun to repent having conceived that brilliant idea, in the following out of which they had fallen into their present serious predicament.

"Oh! that's because the wish is father to the thought, Toby," Elmer told him. "We all like to stand up ahead of the other fellows. If you were home right now I reckon you'd just say that it was a pretty decent sort of a storm; but being cooped up here in the woods makes things look different."

"How deep do you think she is on the level, Elmer?" asked Lil Artha; "as much as three feet?"

"Nothing like that," replied the other, quickly; "you mustn't judge by seeing what's piled up there. That's a drift, and the eddies of wind have been piling it up all night long. You see the snow is as dry almost as powder, owing to the cold. It's quit falling in big flakes, and is sifting down now in fine stuff."

"Yes, and it gets down your back every time, if you don't look out," complained George. "This

beats my time all hollow. I wonder how it'll end."

Elmer purposely made out to mistake the croaker's meaning; he knew that George was thinking of the dismal outlook by which they were confronted, but chose to pretend it was something else that was intended.

"What, this storm, George?" he said, cheerily; "oh! it'll wind up before a great while. They all have their innings, you know, some longer than others."

"I should say this was one of the longest, then," George affirmed.

"But after it does stop we can make up our plans, and start to carry the same out," Elmer continued, knowing that if he kept the minds of his companions employed in some fashion they would not find much time to worry. "I'm going to settle down pretty soon by the fire here, and figure things out again. This time we want to make a sure job of it. I know the wiggly route we've taken to get here, following that little creek, and I've settled it in my mind just which way we ought to go to remedy our blunder."

"It wasn't so much a mistake as false tips we received, you remember, Elmer," Lil Artha was quick to say.

"Yes, that skunk told us wrong just to have what he thought would be a silly joke on scouts," Toby added. "Guess he thought we considered ourselves some punkins because we wore khaki suits, and he was mean enough to want to take us down a peg. I'd like to see that same chap again.

What I wouldn't do to him wouldn't be worth telling."

"At any rate he's forced us to have a novel experience," Elmer told them. "Only for his sending us on a false scent we wouldn't have had the chance to know what scouts can do when storm-bound in a snow forest. Some time, when it's all away back in the past, and you can sit and think of it without getting furious, perhaps none of us may feel quite so hard about that young scamp's work."

"Huh! about that time begin to feel of your shoulders," grunted George, "because I reckon the wings will have started to sprout. If I had *my* way I'd condemn that rascal to spend a whole week in a snow camp, with only six matches along, and just enough grub to keep him from starving. Half rations and George Robbins don't seem to agree very well."

"Nothing seems to agree well with you this morning, George," remarked Lil Artha; "I hope it don't turn out to be catching."

"What do you mean by saying that, Lil Artha?" demanded the other, suspiciously.

The tall scout shrugged his shoulders as he went on to cautiously explain.

"Why, you know we were talking about shipwrecked sailors a while back, and how they often had to go on half rations because they carried so little in the boat with them?"

"Yes, go on," urged George.

"Once in a while it gets even worse than that."

Lil Artha continued, gravely, "and they have to draw lots to see who will be sacrificed, so that the rest of the bunch can live."

"Aw! come off, and quit that!" cried George; "you're just trying to scare me, and it don't go worth a cent. Nobody is going to starve here in the woods where we can find some sort of meat to eat, even crow, if we have to come to it, or perhaps muskrat. That's a mighty poor joke, Lil Artha, let me tell you."

"Well, of course I'm hoping myself that things'll never get *just* that bad," the tall scout went on to say, "but only supposin' they did, and the choice fell on you, I'm wondering if ever afterwards the three of us would have to go around all our lives finding fault with everything. I wouldn't like that, George."

"But what about yourself?" demanded the other; "you might happen to be the first victim after all, Lil Artha."

"That makes me smile," he was informed, coolly; "d'ye think now anybody with eyes in his head would be so silly as to pick out a bony scarecrow like *me* when they could settle on a nice plump chicken of your build?" and he playfully dug his fingers in George's ribs as he said this.

"Let's change the subject," Toby broke in with; "this always talking of eatin' seems to jar on my nerves. It sets me to thinkin', and that empty larder stares me in the face. Something's got to be done about it."

"Sure it has," echoed Lil Artha, eying George

closer so that the other squirmed uneasily, and edged further away from him.

"If we stay right where we are nothing will come to us, will there, Elmer?" Toby pursued.

"If you mean anything in the way of game we could hardly expect it," replied the scout master. "The fellow who generally gets there is the one who goes out and finds what he wants, and doesn't hang around home waiting for something to turn up. That's what wideawake scouts believe in."

"Hurrah! that's the ticket! And when can we make a start?" demanded Toby.

"If there's any sign of the storm letting up by noon, we'll clear out and take our chances of finding Uncle Caleb's shack before night-time," he was told.

"And as the snow's so deep," Toby rattled on, "what's to hinder me from trying my bully snow-shoes?"

"Nothing that I know of," Elmer remarked; "only I'm afraid you won't find the going as easy as you expect."

"I won't, eh? What's the reason?" asked Toby, who always wanted to be shown.

"You're a new beginner, in the first place, and a knowledge of how to walk on snow-shoes is something that's got to be gained by experience. I've been on them up in Canada; and they had to dig me out lots of times before I learned how to stand straight. If once you slip it's good-bye to you. Down your head goes, and you can't get up alone because of the clumsy big shoes. They always

carry a long stick to keep from taking these headers, especially when going it alone."

"Anything else?" asked the aspiring one, as he took up the pair of splendid snow-shoes Uncle Caleb had sent him, and made as if to secure his toe in place with the thong intended for that purpose.

"Yes, there's another thing that will make it doubly hard," Elmer informed him. "Dry snow like this is the toughest kind to walk over. When hunters go after deer or moose on snow-shoes they always pick a time after a thaw, when a return of the cold has frozen the wet surface of the deep snow. Over this thin ice they can run three times as fast as the poor deer, which breaks through with every jump, and flounders almost helplessly."

"That sounds almost like plain murder, do you know," Lil Artha vehemently declared, frowning at the idea.

"Well, if you were hungry, and that was the only way to get near a venison mebbe you wouldn't feel so particular," George told him. "I know right now that I wish a splendid buck was doing some of that same floundering near us, and Elmer had a chance to settle his hash for him. It'd sure do me a heap of good just to know we had enough grub for a week, and then some."

"That's a forbidden subject, George," remonstrated Elmer, who wanted to get the minds of his chums directed in more pleasant channels; "let's all get together and compare notes about direction. I said I had a plan, but then I might be off

my base, and some of you could correct me. Four heads are better than one all the time.”

His scheme succeeded, for presently he had managed to get them deeply interested in the subject of location, so that one after another put forward some plan.

It was about all they could do, under the circumstances, that and keeping the fire burning. Even George so far forgot his troubles as to suggest several things that were well weighed before being rejected.

As it turned out, after the conference, Elmer had changed his figures a little, and the latest plan was to head a point south of northwest when they started forth in hopes of finding shelter from the storm.

No one knew the grim necessity for action better than Elmer. While he tried to assume a pleasant face in order to keep the courage of the others up, he understood the serious character of their condition far more than he was willing to openly admit.

They could not expect any one to come and find them, if they continued to stay where they were; and besides the scantiness of their provisions entailed the necessity for doing some sort of hunting in the snow forest in hopes of securing a new supply.

As the morning dragged on many anxious glances were cast out to where that fine powdery substance was showering steadily down, adding to the tremendous quantity that was already on the

ground. If it would only begin to slacken how thankful they would be.

On several occasions some one would exclaim that it looked as though the snow might be coming down in lessened quantities, but no sooner did they begin to pay close attention than the storm seemed to start in again as furiously as ever.

So the time drew near the middle of the day, and as yet they could not say that there was any hopeful sign.

"If it gets along past noon we're in for another night here, I'm afraid," Lil Artha argued, "because, you remember the old saying, 'between eleven and two, it'll tell you what's it's going to do.' Needn't chuckle that way, George, because I've often seen that proved. Seems like that's a turning point most times, if there's going to be any change."

"All silly bosh!" George went on to say, for at least he was not given to believing in "signs" and such things; "haven't I many a time seen a storm go on past noon, and look as black as a pocket, only to clear handsomely about four or five, with the grandest rainbow in the west you ever saw? Those sayings are all bunco, Lil Artha. I'm surprised at as sensible a scout as you admitting that you believe in any of the same. I'm not superstitious, whatever else I may be."

"Oh! well, it doesn't matter which one's right," the tall scout observed; "the thing is there's always a fair chance of its breaking around noon; and let's hope it'll be kind enough to do that same

to-day. I know Elmer wants to make a move as much as any of us, don't you, Elmer?"

"Yes, and I don't care how soon it comes along, either," he was told without the slightest hesitation.

"There's one comfort we've got," said Toby.

"I'd like to hear it, then," George muttered, disconsolately, eying the other half suspiciously, as though he feared another trap intended for his unwary feet.

"We've got stacks of coffee along, and can always have a cup to cheer us up. I think that counts a lot. It not only warms you inside, but gives you courage to face your troubles like a true scout."

"And yet some scouts are never allowed to drink tea or coffee," suggested George.

"I'm sorry for them, that's all," Toby continued; "we don't happen to fall in that class, do we, fellows? My folks let me have one cup every morning; and when I'm in camp I c'n drink all I want. There, look and tell me if you don't think it seems to be lightening in the northwest, Elmer; because that's where all this awful snow is coming from."

"It does look a little better, for a fact!" admitted the scout master, after he had taken a critical observation; "of course I'm not a weather-sharp; and my prediction may not be worth a pinch of salt; but if you asked me I'd like as not say I really believe it was going to break."

"Hurrah!" shouted both Lil Artha and Toby in

concert; for this was the first time Elmer had committed himself to saying what he thought about a possible change in the weather.

More anxiously than ever they waited and watched. The snow did not come down quite so heavily, and was constantly lessening in force. A stiff wind had arisen that cut like a knife; they hoped this was blowing the gray clouds away, and that soon the cheery face of the sun would peep forth through a gap in the curtain overhead. All of them stood ready to greet his advent with a rousing cheer.

"Here, let's get our coffee started, so we can move out right away, if things look good to us!" Elmer told them; and it seemed as though there were four times as many cooks as the supply of food warranted, because every one wanted to have a hand in preparing their scanty lunch.

As one of them had said it promised to be pretty much "coffee and point," and of course he was compelled to tell how the poor Irish during famine times were accustomed to hanging a bit of bacon over the table, and as they ate their potatoes they would point the same at it, as though in imagination they might get some of the flavor that way.

"The Irish were long on praties, and short on bacon," Lil Artha commented, "and with us it's a case of plenty of coffee, and a famine in other kinds of grub; but better times are coming soon, boys, when we'll have plenty," and he managed to cast another of his wicked looks in the direction of George, which being seen by that worthy caused

him to curl his lips in derision, and return the hint with an expression that seemed to say: "you'll have to wait a long time before you taste *me*, Lil Artha, and don't you forget that!"

Things got better and better as the cooking progressed; that is to say, overhead the clouds were plainly showing ragged signs, as though they must presently break, and the storm be of the past.

This fact gave the four boys some reason for cheering up. It was a bleak immediate future that stared them in the face, but being young and full of hope they easily found many things to pin their faith on. Youth is apt to be buoyant, and see only the present; George's habit of complaining, and being a pessimist, doubtless sprang from a poor digestion, and could easily be remedied if he went on a plain diet.

"Watch the smoke, how it goes straight up when the wind stops," Elmer told them. "That's a good sign, and every old hunter knows it. Smoke hugs the ground when the air is heavy with moisture, and ascends when it's dry. I'm more certain than ever now that we're seeing the tail-end of our storm."

"The worst is yet to come," croaked George.

"Smells pretty fine to me," said Lil Artha, sniffing the air, which was charged just then with a delightful aroma of coffee.

"I only wish all of you were as lucky as me," Toby broke in with, showing that he could not tear his mind away from contemplating his present. "Think how slick we'd go skimming along over

the big drifts on our snow-shoes, and not caring five cents whether school kept or not."

"Mebbe we would, and again mebbe we'd be sorry," George told him. "Things ain't always just what they seem. Lots of times you think you're going to have a nice swell drink, and swich! the glass drops, and is broken into bits."

"Well, we've got aluminum drinking cups, so there's no danger of that thing happening to us," practical Lil Artha assured him, for he never bothered his head about evil omens, and all such nonsense.

Toby, who had been bending over the fire, happened to look around presently. Perhaps it was his intention to add some brilliant remark to what he had already said in connection with snow-shoes; but if this were so the thought was driven completely out of his head by something else.

"Oh! my stars! would you see that?" he almost shrieked.

Startled by his exclamation, and half believing that he must have discovered at least a hungry lynx about to spring into the camp, the others whirled around and then they in turn stared as though hardly able to believe their eyes.

A splendid stag had come bounding along through the deep snowdrifts, unaware of the fact that human enemies were so near by, since the wind carried the scent of their presence, as well as the smoke from the fire, in another direction. He had apparently just discovered them at the instant they all looked, for with a flirt of his

antlered head he was making off, jumping gracefully through the deep snow, and doubtless picking his way, even though dreadfully alarmed.

Elmer had started to look for his Marlin, but realizing the hopelessness of getting a shot he desisted, and watched the splendid animal vanish from view.

CHAPTER V

WANDERING THROUGH THE DRIFTS

It was a chagrined and sadly disappointed lot of scouts who turned and looked at each other after the last had been seen of the fleeing buck.

"What a splendid set of antlers he had!" Lil Artha exclaimed.

"To think of how close we came to having a supply of fresh meat!" groaned Toby, shaking his head dismally, as he put a hand on the pit of his stomach, just as if he wished to call their attention to its depressed appearance.

"Was it really a deer?" asked George. "Now, you needn't all turn on me so savagely, like you think I'm away off my base. I've known hungry people to imagine they saw things. Ain't it always the thirsty traveler who sees the mirage on the desert, and thinks he can hear the gurgle of the running water as he looks at the river boiling among the rocks? Course it is; and so I say again, was it really a deer, or did we just *think* we saw one?"

Knowing the folly of trying to convince George when he chose to question even his own eyes, the others made no attempt to swing him around to their way of thinking.

“That goes to show us the meaning of our motto ‘Be Prepared,’ ” Lil Artha continued. “Now, if either Elmer or me had happened to have a gun in our hands how easy it would have been to bowl that fine buck over. And then think what it would mean to all of us. Wow! after this I’m meaning to stick even closer to my gun than a brother.”

“We always shut the door after the horse has been stolen,” said Elmer, “but even in our misfortune you can see the silver lining to the cloud if you look.”

“Then for goodness’ sake, Elmer, point it out, so George can get that sour frown off his face. He don’t believe what he sees, and yet he’s grieving worse than any of us because we didn’t get that venison when we had the chance.”

“If there’s one deer up here in this forest there must be others,” Elmer told them. “You may have noticed that he went off in about the same direction we expect to head in when we start. We may see him again, and if that luck comes our way we’ll try and be ready next time.”

Ten minutes later and chancing to look out over the snow Elmer saw a moving object that gave him a start, until on looking a second time he made it out to be only George, who was prowling around, looking for any signs the deer may have left as he broke through the deep snow drifts.

Evidently George must have been convinced, for when he came in later there was a satisfied expression on his face; and noticing Elmer observing him the doubter nodded his head, and simply said:

"It was a deer all right; I saw his tracks out there!"

They had been sitting by the fire eating their frugal lunch for something like five minutes when the sun suddenly looked down at them, dazzling their eyes with his bright beams glinting from all that snow.

Of course the four boys immediately broke out into a shout, they were so glad to see the cheerful face of the sun again. The meal was finished in record time; but then perhaps that was not to be wondered at, for the supply had run far short of the demand; and Lil Artha, after polishing his pannikin until he could almost see his face in the same, jocosely remarked:

"The sample was pretty fine; now bring on the dinner!"

They were so eager to get moving that they did not allow their state of hunger to give them much concern. The rude shelter was taken down, though they had some trouble with the rubber ponchos, as they seemed to be frozen stiff under the accumulated snow, which from time to time had thawed in the heat of the fire, only to congeal again later on.

In the end, however, everything was packed as before, and having secured their blankets over their shoulders again, the scouts were ready to make a start. Toby had made his threat good, and had his wonderful snowshoes on. He struck out bravely enough, and at first seemed to be able to easily outstrip his companions. This caused

him to feel an unnatural exultation, for he began calling back at them, and derisively telling them to "hurry up," that they were "too slow a bunch for him," and all that sort of nonsense.

Then suddenly this tirade ceased.

"Wonder what's happened to him now?" Lil Artha remarked, turning a grinning face toward Elmer, who simply replied:

"Wait and see, and be ready to laugh, though it's never a laughing matter to the fellow with the snowshoes!"

As Elmer had expected would be the case they presently discovered something floundering in the snow, which upon closer inspection proved to be Toby's feet. He had lost his balance while negotiating a big drift, and in spite of the assistance afforded by the long staff he carried, had taken a plunge, so that when they arrived his feet were where his head should be.

Elmer knew how to go about it in order to right the novice. Toby was no longer bubbling over with enthusiasm as he once more started off. He was learning that even innocent looking snowshoes may have traps concealed about them for the unwary; and afterward he conducted his advance with much more caution.

In spite of this, however, the others had to rescue him regularly about once every fifteen minutes, until finally even Toby was ready to call the experiment off for the time being.

"I'll get there yet, see if I don't," he assured the others, as they gathered around to watch him

take the big cumbersome things off his feet, and sling them over his back. "Uncle Caleb'll teach me how to use 'em; and besides, Elmer, didn't you say this was mighty poor snow for a learner to start out with? Gimme time, and I'll master the trick yet, see if I don't."

Elmer did not doubt in the least but what he would, because this sort of talk showed the determined spirit that always gets there in the end, no matter how many difficulties may be encountered by the way.

They found it hard traveling through all that accumulated snow, even though the pilot of the expedition made it a point to pick out the easiest course, avoiding most of the drifts, though keeping on the course he had laid out in the beginning.

As they went they used their eyes to the best advantage, hoping to discover something in the shape of game, little they cared whether it might be a covey of partridges, a rabbit that was out of its burrow at the wrong time, a deer, or even so small a thing as a gray squirrel.

As the afternoon began to wear on, and their progress was becoming slower all the while, on account of weariness, and the difficulty of pushing through the snow, their hopes took a downward turn with the drop of the sun toward the horizon.

Everywhere lay that unending white blanket. The breeze had stopped, and it seemed as though a deathly silence lay upon all the region round about them, now and then disturbed when some

rotten limb broke under the weight of snow, and crashed to the ground; for in the beginning, before it became so cold, the falling flakes had clung tenaciously wherever they dropped, and thus the trees were in places bending double with their burden.

Still not the slightest sign did any of the boys discover of human presence. If only they could have caught the ringing echo of a woodman's ax, or hear the hello of a hunter returning to camp with game on his back, what a thrill must have passed through their whole bodies; but to have that terrible silence around them was discouraging, to say the least.

All of them were staggering more or less by now. It was the absence of hope as much as the fact of their being tired that caused this. Could they have glimpsed smoke curling upward a mile ahead, to tell them of succor, doubtless even George, who was more worn out than any of the others, would have started on a mad rush to reach the coveted camp where comfort and plenty awaited them.

But that was not fated to be just then. The scouts had by accident found themselves entangled in a network of difficulties, and there were still other experiences awaiting them before they could expect to reach the end of their adventure.

All of them seemed to be holding up as well as could be expected. George could forget his weakness when he chose, and show that he had the right sort of stuff in him, just as Elmer had known all

along. He did not complain even as much as Toby did; though perhaps that worthy was soured by his keen disappointment in connection with his wonderful snow-shoes, which after all had only been a delusion, a snare, and a burden up to date.

They knew that this sort of thing could not keep up a great while longer, for the sun would soon be ready to set in the west, and they must think to prepare for another dismal night in the endless snow forest.

Somehow no one mentioned anything about the prospect ahead now. They dreaded it more than ever, because the conditions were gradually getting harder all the while. When a parcel of well grown boys, with the healthy appetites of their kind, are reduced to cutting their rations down to one-half, they do not face the future with anything approaching enthusiasm.

Their manner of march was about like this: Elmer went in front, breaking a way, as it might be described, and his was the eye that had to pick the course, avoiding all the difficult drifts as much as possible, though heading into the near-north-west as arranged at the time they laid their plans.

Immediately after him came Toby, puffing like a porpoise at times, being short of breath; and occasionally floundering about when he lost his footing or made a miscalculation.

On his heels George plodded along, looking this way and that, ever ready to call to Elmer did he but discover a moving, dun-colored object that might turn out to be the deer they had missed.

Lil Artha brought up the rear, though with those long waders of his it must have been an easy task for him to have taken the lead, since they seemed particularly adapted for carrying their owner through floods of snow or water. Lil Artha kept his gun ready at all times. If game that had been made to hide because of the coming of Elmer attempted to slink away later on, the tall scout was on hand, ready to take advantage of the first opportunity.

So far nothing had rewarded their vigilance, much to their keen disappointment. That there was game to be found in the forest they did not question; but after such a heavy fall of snow it wisely remained in den or hollow tree, waiting for a change in the weather before venturing forth. Hunger would eventually compel most of the animals that did not hibernate like the bear to issue forth and seek their accustomed food; but they could abstain for days, and meanwhile what was to become of the four scouts?

As they moved along the stillness was disturbed by the noisy cawing of a flock of crows that seemed to be disputing some matter. Often had the boys watched the queer actions of crows when holding what Toby called a "cawcus," as though trying one of their number that had been caught doing something unfair, according to crow laws; but never had they anticipated they would begin to observe the noisy black fellows with hungry eyes.

"If it comes to the worst, crow mightn't go so *very* bad," suggested Lil Artha.

“Well, we haven’t got to that point yet, remember!” hastily cried George. “I’m willing to stand for nearly anything, but eating crow is too, too much. What d’ye take us for, Lil Artha; think we’re a bunch of defeated politicians, do you, that have to pay an election wager? No crow for me until I’m at the last gasp. Get out; you black rascals;” and he waved his arms in order to make them fly before Lil Artha could conclude to fire his gun.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE FROZEN MARSH

PERHAPS it was just as well that the crows took the alarm, and flew noisily away. If Lil Artha had taken a shot at them and secured one or more, there might have been a peck of trouble, not only for the crows but some of the scouts as well.

They pushed on for some little time after this in silence. Elmer was constantly on the watch for a possible camping spot. He hardly expected they would be as highly favored as on the preceding night; but then, as no storm threatened, this was not absolutely necessary. He anticipated that they would be able to put up some sort of barrier to keep the keen wind off, clear a place of snow, and do the best possible with what they found.

"Looks like we might be on the border of a sort of marsh," suggested Lil Artha, as he made an extra effort, and caught up with the plodding leader.

"Yes, I began to notice that about ten minutes ago," replied Elmer.

"I only mention the fact," continued the lanky scout, "because it strikes me that several times when Toby read out long descriptive letters he

had from his uncle up here the old gentleman told of getting some of his best views when lying out in a marsh, and watching the little animals play tag, or some game like that, build their nests, and have their scraps. Am I right about that, Elmer?"

"Yes, and I can see what you're hinting at, Lil Artha. You've got an idea this may be that marsh?"

"Correct!" admitted the tall scout.

"And that if we've finally managed to work around, and strike Uncle Caleb's favorite stamping grounds, there's a pretty good chance the cabin can't be a great ways off?" Elmer concluded, while his words brought vigorous nods of approval from the other.

"Wish we could set up a holler that'd reach him!" ventured Lil Artha.

"We might try a few shots and see if they had any result, though I'd rather wait till dark before doing that," the scout master remarked, thoughtfully.

Lil Artha pondered over this for a minute before he made any further remark.

"I reckon you mean you still hope we might run foul of some sort of game that would give us a supper?" he finally observed.

"Well, here's the marsh, and while the snow is deep in most places, we might manage to run across one of their queer little winter houses, you know."

Lil Artha must have been thinking along the

same lines as Elmer, if one could judge from the rapidity with which he took the other up.

"You mean muskrats, don't you, Elmer?"

"Just what I do," came the reply. "Beggars mustn't be choosers, they say; and it looks like that, or go hungry to-night, because we haven't got enough stuff on hand for two, much less four."

"I wonder if they are so very bad eating?" mused the tall scout, wistfully; for prejudice is a hard thing to conquer; and habit backed by imagination is responsible for the choice of many a man's food. What appeals tremendously to one may cause another to shrink.

Elmer laughed.

"I've heard many men say they think musquash as good as almost anything to be had in the woods or swamps up north. The Indians always consider them a dainty," he told his chum.

"Oh! yes, but they are also mighty fond of baked dog," remonstrated Lil Artha.

"So would you be, if you'd been brought up that way. Some people can't bear the thought of eating frogs' legs, and yet those same folks will sit down and calmly swallow a dozen oysters or clams on the half shell. Now, I've always said that the first man who ever gulped down a live oyster had more nerve even than Napoleon. Then, if you only travel around, from China to France, you'll find that things we scorn are called dainties there. Take snails, which bring a high price in Paris markets—have you ever eaten one in all your life?"

"Hold on there, Elmer," exclaimed Lil Artha; "bring on your musquash. I'm ready to give him a fair trial, and if he tastes good, after this you won't hear me draw the line even at baked dog—or crow. Yes, I've heard of people who say they've made a meal off crow, and liked it. Why, down our way the black rascals live on corn, and I don't see why they shouldn't be eatable, especially when a fellow has nothing else along."

"Then I tell you what our programme should be," the scout master continued, as though this ready admission on the part of the other gun-bearer had settled the question with him; "we'll make up our minds about stopping close by here, and on the border of the marsh. While George and Toby are fixing camp, and beginning to gather wood, the two of us can start out and enter the marsh, keeping within calling distance of each other. If there's anything doing we'll bag some game for our supper to-night. How does that strike you?"

"Tip-top, Elmer, and because the sun is getting pretty low over there in the west we'd better be finding that camp-site in a hurry."

"I think I see as good a place as any right now," the scout master declared, as he pointed straight ahead. "You can glimpse what I mean by looking just past that birch that is bent nearly double with the snow. A dead tree lies on the ground, and I should think it would give us all the wood we'll need to-night. That's the main thing to make sure of."

“And there’s a heavy growth in sight, Elmer, that would serve as a windbreak in case it got to blowing great guns before morning, which I don’t think will happen though. Shall I tell the other fellows we’re at the end of our day’s tramp?”

“Yes, because they’re both about as tired as can be, and will be glad to hear the news,” Elmer replied.

So Lil Artha fell back in order to get in communication with Toby and George, who were plodding along with many a sigh and grunt; for their packs were heavy, and the going rough, with all that deep snow to struggle through.

“Hi! hurry along there, fellows!” he called out; “we’re meaning to camp right ahead here. Plenty of wood for a fire, and a windbreak in the bargain.”

“Tell us something about the visible grub supply, won’t you, Lil Artha?” asked Toby, beseechingly. “Is there a good grocery around the corner, and does the butcher call for orders every morning, or just three times a week?”

“Oh! you have to go after your fresh meat,” laughed the tall scout, “and that’s what me’nd Elmer propose doing, leaving you two to fix the camp.”

“All right,” replied the weary Toby, “just as you say. Anything to oblige; and here’s hoping you run up against the best of success. A broiled partridge, or three slices of juicy venison in the fryingpan would about suit my taste.”

“They don’t grow juicy venison up here, you

ought to know, Toby; every kind I ever heard of was as dry as tinder, and had to be cooked with slices of bacon to make it taste just right. But considering that we've made way with the last scrap of cured pork I guess we'll take it any old style."

Lil Artha did not think it wise to spring the muskrat idea too suddenly on those unsuspecting fellows. He had a vague idea that should Elmer and himself meet with success, and knock over several of the marsh dwellers with the unenviable name, they might skin them, and let their chums imagine that they were eating squirrel or rabbit or something like that. Afterwards, when they had set the stamp of approval upon the dish, the truth could come out. Prejudice by then would have been overcome by the knowledge that "musquash," the Indian dish, was all right.

When the little struggling party reached the spot Elmer had selected, and every one had a chance to survey the situation, a unanimous approval of his choice was the result.

"You couldn't have done better if you'd tried," said George.

"Don't believe there's as good a camp-site within five miles," Toby added; but perhaps the tired condition of the boys had something to do with this endorsement on their part; just then any place would have satisfied their desires, which were not very exacting.

The heavy packs were quickly hung from the lower limb of a tree under which the camp fire was

to be made. It was a pine, and beneath it the ground seemed to be fairly clear of snow, most of what had fallen still clinging to the tree itself.

"Better not waste any more time, had we, Elmer?" asked the tall scout, as he nervously handled his Marlin gun, anxious to start out after game.

"No, get busy, please," said Toby; "don't bother about us, for we know how camp ought to be made. All we ask is that you come back loaded down with something to eat."

"We don't care much what it is, if only you cut out crow," George added.

Lil Artha gave his fellow Nimrod a quick look, as much as to say, "that lets us out, and we can fetch home the musquash with a clear conscience—if so be we're lucky enough to bag any."

They went away in company. The last words George flung after the departing comrades was a caution.

"For goodness' sake now, don't go and get lost in that marsh, or we will be in a bad scrape. Things are hard enough as it stands without our getting separated. If you don't just know where the camp is located give three yells, or fire three shots as fast as you can. We'll answer you back, and keep hollering till you show up. Three shots, remember."

Once the two scouts entered the frozen marsh they kept together for a short time.

"How'll I know a muskrat house when I see it, Elmer," asked Lil Artha.

"Oh! you've seen them often around home, only you forget," replied the other, but in order to make sure, he continued: "you know, they build their nests or houses a little after the same style as beaver do, only of course not so big or secure. If when you're passing a marsh or swampy tract, and spy a number of what look like irregular mounds, or heaps of dead rushes, you can make up your mind muskrats live there. If it's a lake or a stream they can be found in among the rocks too, but not as a rule, because there they are apt to run up against the otter, weasel and the mink, and there's no love lost between those sharp-toothed animals and the muskrat. He's a hard fighter, too, as his jaws tell you, Lil Artha, but hardly a match for a mink in a stand-up scrap. There's a muskrat house right now; let's stop and see if the old fellow is at home."

Accordingly they surrounded the accumulation of dead rushes and leaves and other refuse, after which Elmer tore it to pieces, while Lil Artha stood guard, ready to take snap judgment should the occasion arise.

It turned out to be a disappointment, however, for the mound was empty.

"Nothing doing, eh?" grunted the tall scout, lowering his gun, which he had been keeping half elevated all the while.

"No, and I didn't believe we'd have any success here soon after I started tearing the thing down," replied Elmer. "It showed all the signs of being a deserted shack."

"What could have happened to the former inhabitant, do you think?" continued the disappointed one, to whom even musquash stew was beginning to appeal more and more, as the chances of securing any sort of game diminished in proportion.

"I might guess that he chose to change his place of residence," said Elmer, "or, it might be that Uncle Caleb fancies the old Indian dish once in a while. But let's be moving along. The mill will never grind again with the water that is past; and we're not going to get our supper by standing over a muskrat house that hasn't got any owner."

Another start was accordingly made. Elmer kept track of the direction they were taking. He did not mean to find himself in a quandary when they were ready to turn back again, and not be able to say where the camp lay. Lil Artha knew he could depend on his chum in that respect, and hence he did not concern himself in the slightest degree about such a thing as becoming bewildered. It is a nice thing to have some one to lean upon at all times, though the scout master often took Lil Artha to task because of his willingness to let another do his thinking for him.

"Let's separate a little," Elmer suggested, presently, when they had gone along for quite some distance and found nothing at all. "We ought to be able to keep in sight of each other easily enough; and the same time cover a lot more ground, and in that way increase our chances."

"I'm agreeable," chirped Lil Artha, not sus-

pecting how great an influence on their future fortunes even that little incident was going to prove; "I'll swing off to the right here, and follow this swale, while you keep straight on. I rather like the looks of things over this way, and p'raps I'll run across a colony of those r—I mean musquash."

"Give me the wolf call if you do," Elmer told him, smiling at the quick way Lil Artha had corrected himself when about to give that unpleasant name to the furry little denizen of the marsh they were seeking so eagerly, so as to improve the looks of their larder, and satisfy a craving they felt for making his acquaintance in a stew.

Elmer watched the tall scout move along the swale he had mentioned. He fancied that Lil Artha was about right when he declared it looked as though something might be found in that direction, if signs stood for much.

"I certainly hope, then, he strikes it," Elmer mused as he rambled on, dodging all the drifts whenever he could, and straining his eyes for a sight of welcome signs; "because we need it worse than we ever needed anything before."

He had just succeeded in evading a bad place, and was about to look again in order to learn where his chum might be, when without warning there came two reports in quick succession right beyond a bunch of thick brush and not two hundred feet away.

Elmer immediately started toward the spot as fast as he could go. He thought he heard loud

words spoken, and was in a fever of suspense, fearing Lil Artha might have hurt himself, until rounding the obstruction he saw the other standing there, holding his Marlin gun dejectedly while he stared into space.

“Oh! Elmer!” exclaimed the tall scout, as soon as he noticed that his companion was close to him; “a deer, as sure as smoke, and I fired point-blank at him both times; but hang the luck, I must have missed the beggar, for he gave an *awful* jump, and went off like a streak, worse luck to me for a bungler!”

CHAPTER VII

LIL ARTHA SAVES THE DAY

"THAT'S too bad, Lil Artha," said Elmer, "but no matter, I'm sure you did the best you could."

That was just like Elmer. Plenty of fellows, in the first flush of keen disappointment, would have allowed themselves to speak more or less bitterly, and complain that it must have been rank carelessness that would account for such bad results. But Elmer saw that the tall scout was already suffering keenly; and his first thought was to console him.

At the same time he was looking about, and while the chagrined hunter began to aimlessly open his gun so as to thrust new shells into the barrels, Elmer went on to say:

"Point out to me just where the deer was when you fired, Lil Artha."

"Oh! now even you suspect that I just imagined I saw one, Elmer," sighed the other scout, "but d'ye notice that log lying across the other, something like a letter X? Well, he jumped clean over that when I gave him the second shot. Oh! he was as big as a barn to me, I tell you, and how I could ever miss him with the barrel that had the buck-shot shell in it beats my time. I ought never to go

out in the forest alone; I'm a fine duck of a hunter, ain't I? If it depended on Lil Artha to keep the camp in game we'd all turn into living skeletons, like the one in the sideshow of the circus last summer. Oh, rats—but not muskrats—I'm feeling pretty sick."

Elmer had not waited to listen to all this lament on the part of the disappointed marksman. Pushing forward he was now at the crossed logs. Immediately he called out in a loud voice that seemed to have an air of excitement about it:

"Hi! there, Lil Artha, come here, and hurry, too!"

Upon that the tall scout jammed the breech of his gun shut, having succeeded in reloading the same, and he lost no time in hastening to join his chum.

"W-what is it, Elmer?" he asked, breathlessly. The other pointed to his feet.

"What do you call that, and that, and that?" he asked, impressively.

Lil Artha stared, and over his thin face there crept a look, almost of rapture, as he ejaculated:

"Blood spots on the snow, as sure as anything, Elmer! Oh! then I must have hit that deer after all! I'm glad, and then again I'm sorry. If he had to get away from us, I'd much rather not a single piece of lead had found him. Now he'll only suffer, and it'll do us no good at all."

"Hold on, don't be too sure about that," remarked Elmer, as he started to step across the logs, and follow the plainly marked red trail over

the otherwise spotless field of pure snow; "that chap has been struck hard, and I don't believe he can go very far before he drops!"

At hearing this Lil Artha became greatly excited.

"Then let's chase after him right away!" he exclaimed. "Goodness knows we need fresh meat about as much as anybody could, because we're almost half starved, and haven't a ghost of a show at anything else. And if the poor thing does drop think how mean it'd be to have the foxes and other varmints gnaw at *our* deer all night long, while we sucked our thumbs in camp, and went hungry."

All this while Elmer was following the trail. It was an easy task, and even the tenderfoot scout of the troop might have accomplished such a proposition without being coached.

"Don't you see that it seems to be getting stronger all the while," he explained to Lil Artha, who was close at his heels, holding his breath with eagerness as he tried to look ahead so as to glimpse the welcome sight of the deer fallen at last through sheer exhaustion, "and take my word for it, we're pretty sure to get your game before we go back to camp."

"Well, that would tickle me more'n I could tell you, Elmer," the other assured him, with visions of glorious feasts rising up before his mind.

"And there he is!" added the other, quickly, "just at the foot of that fir tree!"

They made a spurt, and were soon bending over the deer, which they found quite dead, though life

had evidently just departed. Lil Artha could hardly contain himself. He insisted on shaking hands several times with Elmer, and then did the same thing with himself, bubbling over with delight.

"Oh! tell me I'm not dreaming, Elmer, and that I have really and truly shot a fine deer, just when we needed it the worst kind?"

"There's no mistake about it, old fellow, because here's your deer as plain as anything," Elmer assured him, not a little pleased himself at the great success that had accompanied their hunt.

"Think how the other fellows will yell when they see it!" Lil Artha continued, "and Toby needn't be afraid he's going to starve yet a while, need he?"

"I should think not," the scout master admitted; "when there's all this fresh venison to be cooked. The country is saved, Lil Artha, and you're the lucky one to be our George Washington. The boys will be wanting to kneel down and kiss the back of your hand."

"If they try any of that softy business they'll take a back seat in a hurry, let me tell you," was what the matter-of-fact scout remarked. "But, Elmer, ain't it queer that somehow the snow woods don't look quite so dreary to me now? Fact is, I kind of think this is as pretty a sight as I've seen for a long time."

Elmer laughed at hearing that.

"They always say circumstances alter cases, Lil Artha, and when I hear you talking that way

I know it's true. When a man's as hungry as he can be and yet live, the world looks different to him from what it does an hour later after some kind friend has filled him up. This deer gives you the magic spectacles through which you view things in an altogether different light."

"I guess you're right, Elmer," admitted the other; "I was feeling blue, and so I looked at everything through blue glasses. Now I'm seeing rosy. But say, however will we manage?"

"You mean about getting the game back to camp, I reckon, Lil Artha?"

"That's what I'm striking at, Elmer. We must be some distance off, and I should think the deer would weigh between a hundred-and-fifty and two hundred pounds; a pretty hefty load for two boys, with all this snow around. And yet to have to stop so as to cut the deer up would delay us like fun."

"Wait, and let's look around for a strong pole," suggested Elmer, who had seen heavier game than this carried for miles by two husky cow punchers or hunters. "I have some good stout cord along, which we'll use to tie his forelegs together, and then the hind ones ditto. The pole will pass through, and is carried on a shoulder of each. That's the way hunters always get their shoot to camp, if there are a pair of them."

The necessary pole was soon discovered, and they managed by means of jumping on the same to reduce it to the required length. Then the scout master made good use of his cord in order

to secure the legs of the deer in such a way as to afford a hold when the pole was shoved through. Nothing now remained but to lift the game, and start over the back trail.

As long as the light held they would find no difficulty whatever in keeping on the track; and should twilight rapidly change into darkness Elmer had his bearings so that he could lead aright.

Lil Artha had considered that he was "dog-tired" up to the time he started that deer from where it had been lying in some brush; but this was forgotten in the excitement of the hour. When glorious success rewards the efforts of the hunter he seems to have been granted a new lease of life; and weariness is forgotten.

All the same the load was no light one, and the going very bad. Many times they staggered, and once both of them fell down. But the snow prevented any injury, and they were in too satisfied a frame of mind to complain.

"We'll have our revenge all right later on, Lil Artha!" the scout master told his comrade as they got up and dug the snow out of their ears, as well as shook another accumulation free from their collars.

"That's right, we will," assented the other, "and for every tumble like that I promise myself an additional chunk of deer meat for supper. Another thing, Elmer, we ought to remember; the heavier the game the more grub we'll have."

"You know how to see the bright side of things, Lil Artha," Elmer told him.

"Oh! anybody can when success comes along. It takes fellows like you to keep smiling when things are going wrong all around. But I've learned a lesson, Elmer, and after this I won't despair, no matter how dark the clouds look."

"If one deer can reform a scout, what would big game like an elephant do?" asked Elmer, "but then again I'm a little sorry too, Lil Artha."

"What for?" demanded the panting hunter who held up the other end of the pole that bent under the weight of the suspended game.

"We won't have that chance to settle whether the Indians knew a good thing when they said musquash was better than 'coon or 'possum, or even rabbit stew!"

"Gosh! don't waste a tear over that, Elmer. Besides, while we're up here with Uncle Caleb, like as not we'll have plenty of chances to give that dish a try. But honest to goodness, it doesn't seem to strike me just as much as it did before I cracked over this bully young buck for you said it was a fairly young one, and ought to eat tender enough."

"I guess that's only natural," the scout master told him. "While we were facing starvation, why stewed musquash sounded right good to us; but with a whole carcass of venison on our hands it's plain muskrat again; and there you are, Lil Artha."

"How d'ye think we're getting along by now?" asked the tall scout with a little vein of entreaty in his voice

"Oh! perhaps half-way there, more or less," came the reply.

"Whew! think we can make the raffle with this mountain of a deer, Elmer?"

"Seems to weigh about three hundred now, don't it? That's because we're getting more tired all the time. But since we've started it would be a shame to stop. And think of the joy we'll be bringing Toby, and poor hungry George."

"That does seem to help out some," admitted Lil Artha, taking occasion to change his end of the pole from the right shoulder to the left.

"Keep in step with me as much as you can," advised the leader; "that does more than you'd think to make the going easier. It's a point everybody learns who has to carry heavy burdens this way. Coolies over in China know it. Horses running together pull easier if they happen to go in step. You've watched a pair trying to start, with a stalled wagonload of freight. When first one bucks hard, and then the other, there's nothing doing; but once get them to combine, and away she goes on the jump."

There was little that escaped the observation of Elmer Chenowith; and he never failed to try and impart some of the information he picked up to those of his chums who did not happen to be so keen-eyed.

"It's getting dark; and I can hardly see our old tracks now!" announced the tall scout, presently.

"Well, we're near enough to camp to have them hear us if we chose to give out a yell," he was

told, reassuringly, "but for my part I think we'd better keep right along as we have been doing, and surprise the boys."

"Oh! I thought I glimpsed a star through the trees ahead just then, Elmer, but that couldn't be so."

"It's the fire, and I've seen it several times, but didn't want to say anything until you had a chance to make the discovery for yourself!" Elmer declared.

"Bully for that!" exclaimed Lil Artha, "and now we've just got to buckle down to our load, for I'd be ashamed to have to call for help when we're on the home stretch."

He watched for that welcome glow all the while, and whenever it came it seemed to give Lil Artha renewed strength. In this manner, then, did they finally approach the camp under the pine tree. Presently they could see the moving figures of their comrades, and then Elmer announced:

"They must be getting a little worried about us, because there's Toby standing up and looking this way as hard as he can. I think you'd better give a whoop, so as to let them know we're coming."

That was just like Elmer; he wanted Lil Artha to have the first say, because the honors should be fitted to his brow. And when the lucky hunter did give a shout no doubt there was enough of joy in it to tell those in camp their comrades were not returning quite empty handed.

When they saw what the two Nimrods were

carrying slung on that bending pole that rested on their sore shoulders Toby and George gave a series of shouts themselves:

"Lo! the conquering hero comes; get the laurel wreath ready," cried the dancing Toby, and then adding: "A deer! Tell me about that, would you? Oh! what great luck. Who shot it? Elmer, was it you? What, Lil Artha got his buck after all, did he? Well, well, well, if that doesn't beat anything I've heard this long while. And won't we have the grandest feast to-night ever heard of? Oh! say, I'm just trembling all over, I'm so crazy with joy, and p'raps weak, too, because I haven't had enough to eat. Lil Artha, shake hands with me, won't you; and later on you've got to tell us just however you managed to knock such noble game over."

Meanwhile George, who had not said a single word, went over to where the tired hunters had dropped their burden. He was seen to bend down and feel of the animal, first about its antlered head, and then even down its hind quarters to its pretty little hoofs. After that he turned to Lil Artha, and said in a relieved tone:

"Why, it is a deer, sure enough! I was beginning to think hunger had made us see things that didn't have any foundation. But after I've proved my sight by my sense of feeling I can believe it. And you shot him, did you, Lil Artha? Well, I want to congratulate you, old fellow."

It was just like Lil Artha, bubbling over with mischief, and feeling ever so happy because good

fortune had come his way, to look meaningly at George, poke him suggestively in the ribs as he had done once before, and with a wink say:

“That’s all right, George, and I’m sure I thank you; but between us don’t you think after all you’re the one to be congratulated? Consider what you’ve p’raps escaped by my lucky shot. But it’s all right, George, and no reason for you to lie awake nights after this, worrying. You can keep on getting fatter and fatter, now, because the danger is past,” and then he watched Elmer getting ready to exercise his skill in cutting up the deer, so they could have a supply of meat for supper.

CHAPTER VIII

A PRIZE IN THE TRAP

"How's the wood supply?" asked Elmer, while preparations were going on looking to their having a generous supply of fresh venison for supper.

"Not so good as last night," replied Toby; "it's twice as hard to get, you see; but then, George has agreed to start in again later on, and pile up more stock. He certainly does swing that little hand-ax of yours to beat the band, Elmer."

"Did any of your people come from the South of Ireland, Toby?" demanded the said George; "because you've got the gift of gab down to a fine point, and know how to blarney a fellow first-class."

"But you did say you would chop a whole lot more wood," protested Toby.

"Sure I did," continued the other scout, "but it was agreed at the same time I'd spell you in the job, and bring in as much as you did. Now, since Elmer and Lil Artha have tramped so far, and lugged this splendid young buck all the way into the camp, the least the rest of us can do is to make sure of the fuel supply. And, Toby, I'm going to hold you to your word."

"Well, after we've dined perhaps I won't feel

so weak as I do now, and then we'll see what's to be done," Toby acknowledged.

Elmer had made a pretty good job of cutting up the deer. It was not the first time he had had to undertake such a task; and besides, he had watched other hunters accomplish it frequently, up there in Canada on the farm and cattle range.

Before a great while the four chums were all busily engaged in cooking meat after various styles. Some choice pieces had been thrust into the fryingpan, with a couple of slices of bacon which Toby managed to resurrect from some hiding place or other, and from the appetizing odor that soon began to rise it was evident that they were going to have a great feast. Other "chunks" of meat were thrust on the ends of long and stout splinters of wood, and these were held out near the red ashes in certain places, where they would get in contact with the fierce heat, and begin to brown, hunter-style.

It might as well be confessed right here that in the end this last method of cookery did not appeal to the boys as much as the fryingpan style. Perhaps they did not know just how to go about it, as experience is needed to get the best results from anything; but in spite of their labor they found that while the meat cooked, and even burned on the outside, it was almost raw within. Still, hunger causes a camper to forgive such small faults as this; and as they started on the poorer supply to finish with that cooked in the skillet, there were few complaints.

All of them gorged so much that it became necessary for them to lie around and rest for some little time after the meal was over. Indeed Toby showed a desire to hug his blanket, and doze in the warmth of the fire, so that George had to urge him to remember the bargain they had made with each other, and start to collecting more wood.

Elmer soon joined in the labor, for he knew they would need all they were able to gather; and besides, he was so constituted that he could not bear to lie around when others were working, no matter how tired he might feel.

So Lil Artha, although he really believed he had earned his rest, not to be shamed by all this honest toil on the part of his three mates, also strolled forth, to return several times dragging some branch he had managed to break loose.

The collection of firewood was not near so formidable as on the preceding night but then as there was no storm in progress now they might get along fairly comfortably on what they managed to haul in.

"Lucky thing you put such a fine edge on the camp hatchet before starting on this trip, Elmer," George remarked, pausing in his chopping to recover his breath.

"I wouldn't think of starting anywhere without getting everything ready," replied the scout master. "If you look ahead, and be prepared, you'll ease things a whole lot most of the time. As there are no nails to strike in this wood, and every chopper is warned to keep clear of stones, that

edge ought to hold good through the whole vacation time. And it's a great joy to see the steel eat into the wood like that camp hatchet does. Let me take a whirl at it again, George; you've done your share of the work in great shape."

So it would seem that despite George's failings he had many good points about him, and often expressed a desire to relieve a comrade who had begun to show evident signs of weariness. Perhaps by slow degrees he might be weaned from that exasperating habit of complaining, and forever doubting things.

All was quiet around them, not even the whispering of the night wind in the snow-laden branches of the pines being heard. Toby declared it seemed as solemn as a funeral to him, and that he did love the good old summer-time to be outdoors, while the crickets, katydids, frogs, and everything else kept up a friendly chorus, that helped a fellow to sleep. Now it was so "awfully still that you could almost hear yourself think!" he told the others, as they began to get their blankets ready for a night's rest.

Already one experience in bunking amidst the snow piles had given the boys a number of useful suggestions from which they meant to profit on this second occasion. The rubber ponchos were used, not as a curtain to shield them from the air, but under their blankets to separate them from the ground, and serve to keep the dampness away. The heat of the fire was apt to melt the surrounding snow to some extent; and the warmth of their

bodies acted after a fashion in the same way; so those waterproof rubber blankets proved invaluable. They should always be taken by those who go to the woods, and will be found to be worth their weight in silver every time.

Taken in all that was not such a bad night for the boys. There was no wind, and Elmer managed to awaken frequently enough to keep the fire from going out; so that with the blessing of their warm blankets, which they wrapped closely about them, the scouts did not really suffer.

Everybody was very glad when dawn came along, dreary as the aspect might be. It made a wonderful difference in their feelings just to know that there was no longer any possibility of immediate starvation. George must have dreamed that some trouble had descended upon them, because the very first thing he did after crawling out of his blanket was to hurry over to where they had fastened the balance of the precious venison, encased in the hide of the deer, to the limb of a tree, and closely examine the pack; Elmer, who was watching him, with a smile on his face, heard the doubter say in a relieved tone:

“Shucks! it must have been a bad dream, after all; we *did* get a buck, and had a bully old supper last night, because here’s the rest of the meat, as plain as anything. Must have eaten too much, and had the nightmare; but I’m glad it was only a dream, that’s right. Yes, this is frozen fresh venison, as sure as my name’s—”

“Doubting George!” sang out Lil Artha, who

it seemed had also been watching and listening from behind the folds of his blanket; and even Toby thrust his grinning face in sight to add to the confusion of George.

They bustled around without any more delay, because the air was nipping cold, and of course they were furiously hungry again; boys always are when they wake up, especially when camping out, and during frosty weather.

Breakfast was cooked in great shape. It was a duplicate of the previous night's meal, but then what did that matter, when there was an abundance for all? Quantity and not so much quality was what pleased those four outdoor chums just then. There was a horrid vacuum to be filled, and they were more concerned about how this was to be accomplished than in a lengthy bill of fare.

After that came a consultation—Lil Artha called it a "council of war." They sat around the fire, which felt so good no one was in any great hurry to abandon it, and talked the matter dry from all sides. Every one gave expression to his opinion, and Elmer, acting as master of ceremonies, tried to extract all that was good and worth preserving from each proposition.

It was determined first of all to try firing their guns several times, to see if they could get any answer. Should Professor Caleb hear the shots he would be very apt to reply, and in that case they would have no difficulty in deciding as to what course to pursue.

Should this fail to bring about any result, they

must make a start; and in the end it was determined to keep along the border of the marsh. That was most likely to be one of the places where the old trapper and wild animal photographer was apt to conduct most of his operations, and they would stand a chance of running across some sign of his presence.

So Lil Artha fired both barrels of his gun, with about five seconds coming in between; and then Elmer discharged one of the loads in his weapon, after waiting a like interval. In this way the required three shots were sent forth; and Elmer assured his comrades that this had always been reckoned a call for help everywhere, in the Far West, among African tangles, and even down in South American wilds; so that if Uncle Caleb were within hearing distance they would surely get a response.

All of them listened intently after the last shot. The wind had come up again with the sun, and was making various queer noises among the treetops; but still it would have been possible for them to have caught a shot, if such had sounded from any quarter near by.

“Nothing doing, seems like!” remarked George, dejectedly, for of course he was the very first one to get what Lil Artha called “cold feet,” because there appeared to be no immediate response to their effort.

“Shall we try it once more, Elmer?” asked Lil Artha.

“Just a sheer waste of ammunition, and p'raps

we'll need every bit we've fetched along," grumbled George.

The scout master, however, decided that it would be only right to give the scheme one more trial before utterly condemning it; so having replaced the empty shells he and the tall boy again sent out the three shots that would tell any who heard the signal that some one was in need of assistance.

There was no answer, though they listened eagerly, and once Toby started, under the impression that he had caught a faint hello; but as it was not repeated he concluded it may have been some distant owl giving vent to its disappointment at not getting a full meal during the period of darkness just passed.

"One thing we might take for granted after this," Elmer went on to say; "wind's in the wrong quarter to carry the sound of the shots to him. So we could judge from that our best course is to make against the wind. It would seem that we might have two chances of finding him that way, to one the other."

The others agreed with Elmer, for they could easily grasp his meaning; George was seen to shake his head, however, and it was evident that he did not have very much faith in such a thing as success coming to them. And yet if it did, George could be counted on to be one of the first to say that he always did believe they were bound to run across Uncle Caleb, sooner or later.

"Scouts are supposed always to be sure their

fire is dead out before they leave a camp," remarked Lil Artha, as they trudged laboriously along, "but in this case I took notice that none of us seemed to bother our heads even a little bit over it, and in fact we left it crackling away right cheerily."

"Well, with a blanket of snow two feet deep on the ground," observed Toby, "I'd like to know how the woods could ever get afire this day. And that blaze was such a good friend to us I didn't have the heart to throw snow on the same. It'd seemed too much like calling a dog to you, patting him on the head after he came, wagging his tail in a friendly way, and then tying a tinpan to him, after which you gave him a nasty kick to start him yelping and running. But here's hoping we meet up with my uncle before the third night comes."

"I should say, yes," added Lil Artha; "if this sort of thing keeps on we'll be likely to spend all our midwinter vacation roaming around up here, and getting nowhere."

"And," Toby further complained, with a sad shake of the head, "we'd laid out to have such a bully good time at his cabin, learning all about trapping, and p'raps going out with him nights to use his flashlight contrivance, and get pictures of the little fur-bearing animals in their native haunts."

"Oh! it's going to be all right," announced Elmer, who as usual saw the bright side of the situation. "Something's sure to turn up to-day; and

before another night we'll be toasting our feet in front of a fire indoors, with a bunk to crawl into when we're sleepy, and something else besides dry venison at meal times."

"Here, don't say a word against that same venison!" exclaimed Lil Artha; "it's been a life-saver, let me tell you. And to think I was ready to own up I'd missed my deer, only for you, Elmer. That taught me a lesson I'll never forget, believe me. After this I'll always look for signs when I've shot at game, and never just guess at things."

"Nothing like making sure, every time," remarked George.

"Guess you go by that motto, old fellow," Toby told him. "They don't fool you very often, do they; and never twice on the same racket?"

Along about the middle of the morning, after they had been making rather slow progress, and laboring heavily, Elmer was seen to betray sudden interest, and to quicken his footsteps. Then he turned, and beckoned wildly to them. As the other toilers reached his side the scout master pointed ahead of him, and remarked:

"There's something moving in the snow yonder, boys; look and see if you can make out what it is!"

At that they all stared very hard, and Lil Artha was the first to exclaim:

"Seems to be some sort of small animal switching around like it might be caught in a trap, Elmer!"

"Yes," added Toby, "I saw it jump up then, and whatever it is the thing looks a sort of silver gray or black. There, didn't you see again? Elmer, do you know what it can be?"

"Somebody, and perhaps Uncle Caleb, has planted a trap right here, and a fox is caught in the same by its leg!" came the ready reply.

"A fox, did you say!" echoed Lil Artha; "why, Elmer, none of us ever saw a fox of that color before. Every one I've ever set eyes on was either gray or red."

"Let's step up closer," the scout master remarked, "and we'll be able to tell more about it."

As the four boys continued to advance the little animal struggled harder than ever to break away, but without success. It was undoubtedly a good-sized fox, for they could not mistake that bushy tail, and the sharp nose as well as shrewd face. It showed its white teeth quite savagely as they drew nearer.

"Well, it is a fox all right," Lil Artha admitted, "though different from any I ever saw in the woods, or even in a menagerie."

"A good reason for that," Elmer told him, quietly; "such a silver fox is rare, and too costly for showmen to keep, as a rule. A red fox may be worth all the way from five to thirty dollars, but from what I've read about the value of furs, the pelt of a genuine silver fox sometimes brings more than fifteen hundred dollars, even in its raw state."

"Gee whiz! you don't tell me?" exclaimed

George, looking astounded; and of course he did not believe what Elmer was saying, because it sounded too incredible for him to swallow.

“Oh! I’ve read something about these black foxes, come to think of it,” Lil Artha admitted, “and so this is one, is it? Well, Uncle Caleb must have known he was around, and set this trap on purpose to get him.”

“Yes, that’s about the size of it,” added Toby, “because I happen to know that as a rule he never bothers trying to trap any of the little animals up around this section. He used to, just to pass the winters away, but when he got interested in photography he said he found ten times as much pleasure in creeping up on them, and shooting with a camera, to anything he had ever done before with a gun. Fact is, he seldom uses his gun except to get an occasional deer, some partridge or a rabbit to serve him as fresh meat.”

Elmer bent over a little closer, and examined the condition of affairs.

“We’ll have to knock that fox gently on the head, I guess,” he remarked. “You can see that the trap has cut deeply into his leg, and if he was let alone another hour or two he would be likely to gnaw that paw off in order to get free. They often do this. You see the cruel jaws of the trap mutilate their leg, and pain so much when they struggle that in desperation they bite at it until they get away; and after that a three-legged fox is found roaming the woods. Besides, it would be

a shame for Uncle Caleb to lose that splendid prize.”

“I guess you’re about right, Elmer,” Lil Artha observed, “and so we leave it to you to put the poor little fellow out of his misery. It’s been a tough thing on him because Nature gave him a silver black coat. If he’d been an ordinary red fox Uncle Caleb might never have bothered setting this trap, and he could have gone right along making his suppers off partridges and such nice things, or else chickens belonging to any farmers inside of twenty miles, if there are any. I’ll hold your gun while you do the job, Elmer, because I don’t reckon you’d want to spoil a fifteen hundred dollar pelt by riddling the same with bird shot.”

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF UNCLE CALEB

ELMER may not have exactly fancied the job, but he was one of those fellows who can always be depended upon to perform any duty devolving on him, no matter how disagreeable. And it was not to be thought of that they should pass on, to let the poor little animal gnaw its foot off; as well as disappoint the trapper when he had made such a rare catch.

So handing his pack and gun over to the care of the others Elmer looked about until he spied the right sort of stick with which he could dispatch the little beast by a clip on the head, so as not to spoil the valuable skin in any way.

When this had been done in great shape they examined the silver fox more closely and admired the sheen of his coveted coat, for which wealthy people are ready to pay almost any price.

"Shall we hang it up here above the trap?" asked Toby, presently.

"What for?" Elmer went on to say.

"Why, so Uncle Caleb can get it when he comes along," replied Toby; "you wouldn't want to make him die of heart failure, would you, by letting him see he'd made a catch of a silver fox, and that it was gone?"

Elmer laughed at him.

"Why, what's to hinder our camping right here, and waiting for Uncle Caleb to show up?" he asked.

"Well, I declare, what a lot of ninnies the rest of us were not to think of that!" chuckled Lil Artha; "I tell you it's a good thing for George, Toby, and me that we've got you along, Elmer. We'd be losing our heads next, I'm afraid."

"It wouldn't be the first time you'd lost your head, Lil Artha," George hastened to assure his comrade. "But I want to say that I think the idea is all to the good, and that I'm ready to camp right here, and keep on waiting for Uncle Caleb to show up, whether it takes an hour, a day or a week; so long as our supply of venison holds out."

"So far as that goes," Elmer continued, "I wouldn't be surprised to see him any old time, because after the storm he'll be anxious to look into this trap."

Toby stretched his neck and looked all around.

"Don't seem to see anything of him yet," he remarked.

"When he comes," resumed the scout master, "I think you'll find it'll be from that direction over there. I see a good place where we can drop down and hide; so come on, fellows."

"Hide?" echoed George; "whatever would we want to be doing that same for, Elmer?"

"Just to see how disappointed Uncle Caleb looks when he gets here, and finds all these signs

around, the blood on the snow, the hair of a silver fox in the closed jaws of the trap, and footprints everywhere," the scout master told him.

Toby was heard to laugh.

"I can just imagine how he'll act," he ventured; "but then, we'll let him know who got the pelt before he's had much time to growl."

Elmer held the dead fox up by his bushy tail, and George was seen to look keenly at it as he muttered:

"Fifteen hundred dollars, and for that measly little runt? I don't believe there's a word of truth about the story. Somebody's been stuffing you, Elmer."

There happened to be a pretty good hiding-place close by. It lay just about where Elmer would have picked it out had he been given a chance. Here they proceeded to settle down, and make themselves as comfortable as the conditions allowed.

"Wonder how long we'll have to wait?" Toby remarked, after they had scraped the snow away, and made places where they could stretch their rubber ponchos out and with blankets on top form comfortable seats upon which to rest their tired bodies.

"That depends a whole lot on how soon Uncle Caleb would think to start out, and how far he has to come to get here," Elmer told him. "The walking is tough enough for us, and yet we're young. He's a pretty old man, Toby says, and might have a harder time of it than we would.

But then by noon there ought to be something doing, I'd think."

George had been looking around, and now gave them the benefit of his observations.

"Plenty of wood handy, notice, fellows; if we have to hang out here any length of time, why, we could make a fire, and do our little cooking stunt all right."

"Why, what's getting into George," remarked Toby, pretending to be surprised; "he seems never to get enough to eat. Time was when he had a little bird appetite, but these days he's like a hungry bear all the time."

"I don't know what ails me," George replied, "but it must be going on half rations kind of frightened me, and now I'm thinking something might happen again; so I'm bent on laying in a good supply while it lasts."

"We'll have to look around for a whole herd of deer if you keep on that way much longer, George. And I don't know what your folks at home'll do when you get back again. You'll eat 'em out of house and home, that's right," Lil Artha expressed himself by saying.

George took this chaffing in good part. He was feeling splendidly now, since the danger of their facing real want was of the past.

"Oh! that's all right, boys," he told them. "It was only a little while ago my folks were worried about me eating so little, and I guess they'll sing the other way now. Dad'll talk about going into bankruptcy when he watches me

put away the food. Seems like I never could get enough again. I want to eat six times a day, and then complain because meals are so far apart."

"Listen!" exclaimed Lil Artha.

"What did you think you heard?" asked Elmer, after all of them had strained their ears without any result.

"Guess I must have been away off, and it was only a hoot owl after all; but I thought I heard some one cough!" the tall scout declared.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out that way, because it's getting on toward time for him to show up, if he means to come along to-day," said Elmer.

"And now that you mention it," added Toby, "I remember Uncle Caleb does have a sort of cough. That was one reason he took to the woods, for he said it was going to add ten years to his life, living in the open, winter and summer, and eating the plainest kind of food."

After that they began to watch more closely than ever, and also listened carefully to catch a repetition of the sound that Lil Artha believed he had heard.

The great woods in their white snow mantle seemed to be deathly quiet. The air had become far less bitter, and in the sun it was thawing slightly. Occasionally some branch would manage to dislodge its burden of snow, which was apt to rustle through other branches on its way to the ground. Away in the distance those crows were cawing again, as though disputing some

lucky find, or holding a council of war concerning some contemplated movement in search of new feeding grounds. Beyond these little breaks the silence remained profound.

All at once Elmer gave a low "hist!"

The others had caught the same sound, and as it was repeated again and again they began to believe that some one must be approaching from the very quarter in which Elmer had said Uncle Caleb was apt to come.

"What's that queer scraping, shuffling noise mean, Elmer?" whispered Lil Artha.

"I bet you I know," spoke up Toby, also in a cautious tone; "snow-shoes, and my uncle is wearing the same. How's that for a guess, Elmer?"

"You're right that time, Toby; and there he comes!" was the scout master's reply.

Looking again they could all see the figure of an elderly man, dressed in khaki-colored hunting garments, but warmly clad. He was advancing over the surface of the heaped-up snow, and with the free movements of one to whom the use of snow-shoes was an old story. To see the way he lifted his feet, still dragging the long shoe made of bent hickory, and stout gut that crossed and re-crossed diagonally from side to side, it was evident that Uncle Caleb had spent many days and weeks in the woods when it was impossible for him to get anywhere without the use of snow-shoes.

Toby watched him eagerly. He was evidently

thinking that before he left this section of the wilderness he too would be able to walk deftly, after he had been shown the secret of manipulating the clumsy contrivances that served to keep the pedestrian from sinking into the drift.

As the hunter and naturalist drew closer to the spot where he had placed his fox trap they could see that he was getting more and more agitated. Evidently he must have already discovered certain suspicious signs around that gave warning to the effect that he was about to receive a shock of an unpleasant nature.

Uncle Caleb was almost running now. Had there been a glaze on the surface of the snow he would have fairly flown to the spot; but as it was he floundered more or less in advancing hurriedly.

Now they saw him bend down to examine his trap. The presence of the stains on the trampled surface of the snow would be enough to tell him that there had been a victim held between those grim steel jaws of the Newhouse trap. When he found several almost black hairs present he would also understand that he had caught the coveted silver black fox; and while that might add to his joy under ordinary conditions it was only apt to provoke his additional wrath just then; for those telltale footprints all around gave him to understand he had been robbed of his treasure.

He presently got up from his knees. They could see that he was shaking his head as though

he did not like the way things looked. Many winters had Uncle Caleb spent in this vicinity, and never before had he ever known of a case of thievery; that it should come when he had made such a fortunate haul was doubly provoking.

It was hardly wise to carry on the joke any further, Elmer thought; and accordingly he gave the signal for which Toby was waiting. The latter immediately jumped to his feet, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Hello! Uncle Caleb! how d'ye do? You see, I've kept my word, and dropped in to visit you at last. And as you told me to bring a friend or two along, I've fetched our scout master, Elmer Chenowith, also two other bully good fellows, George Robbins and Lil Artha Stansbury!"

The elderly recluse stared at the four boys as though he found great difficulty in believing his eyes. It was as if they had suddenly bobbed up out of the snow-covered earth to surprise him.

"Why, hello! is that you, Nephew Toby?" he presently called back. "Come along and shake hands with me. You're mighty welcome, my boy, let me tell you; and your comrades too. I shall be delighted to meet the Elmer I've heard so much about in your newsy letters; also your other chums."

"But, uncle, we've got a little surprise for you, see?" and as he spoke Toby suddenly held up the silver fox, which act caused the other to smile broadly; "we were directed wrong by a boy, who must have had a grouch against all scouts; and

so we got lost; and then that storm caught us; but we were hunting around for some sign of your cabin when we came on this fox caught in a trap, and with his leg nearly cut off. Elmer said he'd soon be gone, leaving only a paw behind; so he knocked him on the head, and then said we'd better wait here till you came. Is it a real silver black fox, Uncle?"

"And are the skins worth as much as fifteen hundred dollars, sir?" asked George, as though he could never rest again until he had settled that bothersome matter in his mind.

"Yes to both questions, boys," replied the scientist; "this skin may be worth anywhere from a thousand dollars to twenty-five hundred, according to how it is graded; and I'm delighted that you had the good sense to save it for me."

CHAPTER X

POSSESSION NINE POINTS OF THE LAW

“I HOPE you’re satisfied now, George, about that pelt?” Lil Artha whispered to the doubting scout, as they stepped back, after shaking hands with the scientist, who was examining his prize with considerable delight; not that Uncle Caleb needed the money he would likely receive for the skin, if he chose to dispose of it; but it was something worth while to be able to say he had taken one of those rare little, and much sought after animals, a silver fox.

“Y-e-s, I s’pose it must be so, if he says they’re so valuable,” George admitted, but in a way that told how slow he was to take stock in such a fairy tale; so that later on Lil Artha, finding Uncle Caleb had certain articles that had been published in connection with the wonderful prices paid for silver fox skins in the open London market, took pains to see that the doubter read them, and was finally convinced.

“Nothing else would have fetched me out after such a great snow storm,” the recluse told them, presently; “only I was anxious about this trap. You see, I knew all about the ways of mink and foxes, and also how they often gnaw a foot off in order to get free. It would have given me a

bad feeling to come here and find that owing to my delay, and the little animal's hunger, as well as pain, it had done that same thing, and was gone. The forepaw of a silver fox isn't worth much, only to make the disappointed trapper say things he'd be ashamed to have any one else hear."

"Then we're all glad we got here in good time to nip that little escape in the bud, Uncle," said Toby.

"And as my cabin is more than a mile off, with the going pretty poor, perhaps we'd better be setting out for the same right away," remarked the scientist. "I can give a pretty good guess that you've been having some rough times, and will be glad of a shelter to-night. As for myself, I'll be happy indeed to have you with me. It does get pretty lonely at times, even though I'm deeply interested in my hobby of taking flashlight pictures of the small animals hereabout. I've even perfected an arrangement so that lots of times they snap off their own pictures; as you'll see later on when we get to work."

"We've only got a few days to spend up here with you, Uncle Caleb," ventured Toby; "and we must see all there is in a hurry. We've just about got tired of roughing it in the snow, and a change to cabin life will set us up again."

"Then let's start right away, if you boys think you can hold out for lunch until we fetch up at my place. The return journey shouldn't take nearly as long as it did to come up here, because

we can avoid plenty of pitfalls I fell into. How about that plan, Toby?"

"Whenever you're ready, Uncle, let us know," replied the scout. "Can I carry the fox for you; and how about this trap? Perhaps after catching your prize you won't want to leave it around again. If that's so let me take care of it for you?"

"Well, from the looks of things, it seems to me each one of you has enough to tote right now," chuckled the elderly man; "while I have nothing except my rifle. I'm a pretty hardy sort of an old chap, and able to carry my share of the burdens still; so if you don't mind, Nephew Toby, I'll look after both the trap and the silver fox."

Which he calmly proceeded to do; and they discovered afterwards that Uncle Caleb had an iron constitution, being able to do as much as any grown-up of their acquaintance, possibly barring the strong man of the circus, who could bend iron bars across his knee, and allowed an anvil to be pounded on his chest.

It appeared that Elmer had not been far out of the way when he determined on the direction from which they might expect the trapper to come. His figuring this out on the merits of the fact that their shots had not gone against the wind, had a great deal to recommend it, as Uncle Caleb admitted when he heard how scout tactics had been employed.

"I've been wanting to hear a whole lot more about what Boy Scouts do," he told them, as they

trudged cheerfully along; "and while we sit before the fire evenings, you must explain everything to me. From the little I know about it up to date I'm inclined to believe they've at last gotten hold of a very big idea, and one that's going to be of far more lasting benefit to American boys than any other scheme ever thought of in their connection."

"And so far as I'm concerned, sir," replied Elmer, modestly, "I'll be only too glad to give you all the information I can scare up. Our folks believe the same way you do, and as the Hickory Ridge Troop of Boy Scouts has been working for some few moons now, we feel that we've shown what a great improvement belonging to the organization has made in a good many fellows."

"Why, here's George for instance," said Lil Artha, maliciously; "a short time ago his people were worried because he didn't seem to eat half enough; and now he wants the dinner bell to be jangling all day long. That's one of the changes it's made; and I could name others, sir, almost as remarkable."

Even George himself had to join in the general laugh this remark from the long-legged scout brought out.

"I guess you're something of a joker, Arthur," observed Uncle Caleb, turning to smile at the other.

"That's what they all say about me," complained Lil Artha, "that I'm a joke, a freak; as if I could help it that my legs grew at the expense

of my body. But so long as I have the brains to go along with them why should I care whether school keeps or not? What our scout master doesn't tell you, we'll try and fill in; because there are heaps of things connected with our trials and victories of the past that Elmer might fight shy of on account of a false modesty. We have to blow his horn for him, you see, sir?"

"And I wager you blow it right well, too," observed Uncle Caleb.

"Oh! I manage to get some kind of music out of it, even if I'm not the regular bugler of the troop. He's Mark Cummings, and he's away from town right now. But how much further do we have to go before we strike your shack, sir?"

"Not over a third of a mile at the most," came the reassuring reply, that caused the tired boys to pluck up new hope, and in a way gird themselves afresh for the fray.

They had left the marsh behind long ago. Elmer knew from this that its border could not be a very desirable place to camp during the spring or summer, when it was apt to be more or less overflowed, and there was danger of malaria if one persisted in sleeping with fogs abounding frequently of nights.

Now that their troubles seemed all behind them, some of the scouts could look about and even admire the scenery by which they found themselves surrounded. Elmer could at least, and he found many interesting things to hold his attention as they journeyed along, following in a general way

the trail which Uncle Caleb had made in coming from his cabin to the spot where he had left the fox trap, in hopes of snaring the silver black which he knew used that section of the woods.

Every now and then their pilot would point out some object that was associated with certain events in the past. Here he had met with a black bear unexpectedly, and managed to snap off a picture of the surprised Bruin while the animal reared up on his hind legs; and then retreated. A little further on and he showed them where the fire had once caught him in a trap; and how he only escaped a serious singeing by discovering a cleft among the rocks, where he managed to crawl in, and lie until the danger was over. Then there was the tree into which he had been chased by a pack of wild dogs that seemed to have taken a strange dislike for all human beings, and which he had only dispersed after killing several of their number.

All these things were especially interesting to the scouts. They had met with not a few thrilling like adventures in their own experience, during their several camping trips to the woods; though these might sound tame after hearing of what strange happenings Uncle Caleb had experienced.

Toby saw that George raised his eyebrows each time he heard some interesting narrative from the recluse. He was a little afraid the doubter might express himself in his usual skeptical fashion, and demand further proof to back these tales

up before he could give them unqualified approval; but fortunately George had a little too much good sense to commit such an indiscretion; it might go all very well when dealing with boys of his own age, but he did not have the nerve to tell an elderly man, and a professor at that, he doubted his word.

"He's got to be broken out of that bad habit," Toby was telling himself, every time he felt his heart apparently in his throat with apprehension lest George make a nuisance of himself; "and seems to me his chums ought to be the ones to do the thing up brown for George. What a nice fellow he'd be if only it wasn't for his everlasting sneering, and letting you feel he thought you were bluffing him?"

Meanwhile Elmer was studying Uncle Caleb. He quickly came to the conclusion that he would like the other very much indeed. He appeared to be a wonderfully well-read man, with a fund of information on every subject. Besides this, there was a quizzical gleam in his eyes that told the scout master the other was fond of humor, and could enjoy a joke, providing it was not along the lines of practical ones that hurt too deeply.

He was also a master of science, and no doubt had made a name for himself long before he forsook the haunts of men, to spend peaceful months here in the wilderness, studying the ways of the little creatures whose realm he had invaded.

Still, Uncle Caleb was a peaceful man. He never claimed to be a sportsman, and would not

use his gun save as a means of absolute necessity, if attacked by some dangerous wild beast; or else as a means of procuring needed fresh meat, which did not happen very often, since he was inclined to be a vegetarian, and had all his supplies hauled up here by wagon twice a year.

All these things Elmer learned by degrees, and the more he came to know of this remarkable old uncle of Toby's the better he liked him. This business of "shooting" things with a snapshot camera, especially by flashlight and at night-time, had always appealed more or less to Elmer; and he rejoiced to know that he was to be thrown in the company of one who had been more or less successful in obtaining wonderfully faithful pictures of the small swamp and woods animals.

The boys soon began to cast anxious glances ahead, for it was not very pleasant work carrying all the stuff they had brought along with them to the forest; and besides, the best part of the deer Lil Artha had bagged so luckily for himself and friends—particularly George.

"I don't see any sign of a cabin there, do you, George?" Lil Artha remarked in an aside to the other, who chanced to be puffing along at his elbow, and grunting after his customary style, though no more weary than the other three boys.

"No, and d'ye know I'm beginning to think there may be no cabin after all, that's what," replied George, stubbornly. "Of course Uncle Caleb has one somewhere or other; but he may have gotten mixed up in his bearings, you see;

and right now how do we know whether we're heading right or wrong?"

"Well, if you don't take the cake for seeing the wrong side of everything," Lil Artha told him. "Of course there's a cabin, and we must be getting close to it as we stand now. About the old gentleman making a blunder, and wandering off, don't you know we've been following his out track all the while. And say, what's that you can glimpse through this little opening in the woods—in a direct line with these two birch trees, tell me that now, George, you old humbug of a grumbler?"

Thereupon George, only too willing to be convinced, took a long look, and then slowly admitted that he might have been too hasty.

"It does look a *little* like a shack roof, Lil Artha, and p'raps I hadn't ought to have spoken like I did; but even now that may be a fooler. Just wait and let's make sure before we holler."

In another five minutes all doubt with regard to this was ready to vanish even from that wavering mind of George, because they could plainly see one end of what seemed to be a pretty substantial log cabin, with a broad chimney running up the back, fashioned of slabs, and hardened mud that no doubt resembled flint.

It seemed to be an ideal snug retreat for a man who wanted to get away from the world, and enjoy himself after his own fancy. Here Uncle Caleb had come for years, and his visits to the haunts of civilization had been few and far be-

tween. As time passed on they threatened to cease altogether, for he found more real happiness here than he could among mankind, struggling constantly in pursuit of the mighty dollar, and pushing others down in trying to climb.

"How do you like the looks of it?" asked the owner of the cabin, with a touch of pardonable pride in his voice; for he had gone to considerable trouble in order to make the place attractive; and even though mounds of snow covered everything around, the boys could see that he had some conveniences, such as ordinary loggers' camps could hardly boast.

"It strikes me as a pretty sight," Elmer candidly admitted; "and I don't blame you, sir, for keeping up here. I should think you'd feel lonesome sometimes, though?"

"I do, and used to have a friend spend part of the season with me," acknowledged the scientist; "but last fall he married, and went to Europe, so that up to now I've been all alone, and your coming will be doubly welcome as a break in the monotony of the thing."

"But, Uncle, if as you say you are alone, who could that have been I just saw at that little window?" asked Toby.

"I certainly saw something moving inside there, too," Lil Artha asserted, beginning to display something of excitement, as he waited for the other to explain what already began to take on some of the elements of a dark mystery.

Uncle Caleb looked earnestly at the window

they mentioned. It was a small affair, and as they afterwards discovered stood just above the kitchen table, also used during meal-time, since it was the only contrivance of its kind in the cabin.

“I don’t happen to see anything there now, boys,” he went on to say; “but after all it wouldn’t surprise me very much. A very large wildcat has been hovering near my cabin for a week now. I’ve tried to get a picture of the beast several times, but all I managed to secure has been a rolling ball of fur for one, two glaring eyes for another, and the end of a stubby tail for a third. Now, it wouldn’t surprise me a bit if that smart old cat has been watching me, and saw when I went off some time ago. Prowling around it must have climbed on the roof, and then finding it could back down the throat of the chimney, that’s what he’s done.”

“Whoop!” cried Lil Artha, “a wildcat in possession, and has to be kicked out before we can use those bunks. Get your gun ready, Elmer, and we’ll ambush the sinner.”

CHAPTER XI

THE CHIMNEY JUMPER

"Hold on, Lil Artha, don't rush things so fast!" called out Toby.

"Because this isn't our cabin, and before you knock over the uninvited guest it might be just as well to ask permission from the owner," added Elmer.

All eyes were of course turned on Uncle Caleb, although, according to the mind of the impulsive Lil Artha, there was only one thing that could be done, which was to suddenly open the door, and when the wildcat rushed out give him a shot.

"I've been trying to get a picture of that cat so long," Uncle Caleb told them, "that I'd really be very much disappointed now if he met with his fate, and I had to go without a snapshot, even though a distant one, to remember him by."

"It might be arranged," suggested Elmer, quietly.

"Put your trust in our scout master, sir, and you won't be disappointed," Lil Artha went on to say, meanwhile looking curiously toward Elmer, as though wondering what sort of plan he could have conceived on the spur of the moment.

"Tell us how, Elmer?" George demanded, at

the same time eying the cabin with a dubious manner, as though he half believed the boys who said they had seen *something* through the small window must have deceived themselves.

"Why, if the beast came down through the chimney, it strikes me he ought to know enough to go out the same way if alarmed enough," was what Elmer told them.

"A good idea, my boy!" declared Uncle Caleb, "and if I had everything ready, with my little pocket camera focussed on the chimney, I suppose I could snap him off as he climbed out. Now I'll fix that up right away, and when I'm ready I'll sing out. After that some of you can bang on the door, and start shouting, which should be enough to alarm the cat and make it think of scampering out the way it came in."

He was as good as his word. Pushing forward until he was within thirty feet of the cabin, with a good view of the rude chimney-top, and the light in the right quarter to promise a good picture, Uncle Caleb waved his hand to the others.

"All ready here, boys!" he exclaimed after he had fixed himself.

Elmer had spoken to Lil Artha and Toby, who were delegated to be the attacking squad. George and the scout master accompanied Uncle Caleb, the latter holding his gun in readiness.

"Remember," said Elmer, in a tone that every one could easily hear, "there is to be no shooting unless it becomes necessary. If the cat attacks us we'll have to defend ourselves. If it chooses

to go about its business we don't expect to bother it any. Get that, Lil Artha?"

The tall scout replied that he did, though he looked disappointed, as though this thing of sparing so ferocious a varmint as a wildcat just because some one wanted to catch a few pictures of the beast from time to time, did not appeal very much to his sense of the fitness of things. To Lil Artha the cat was without the pale of the law, because it destroyed all sorts of useful things, from young partridges, rabbits and squirrels to domestic fowls; and he knew there never was a time that any State in the Union ever attempted to bar its hunters from killing every bobcat they could find, the more the merrier.

"Then start your racket!" Elmer told the two who were standing close to the cabin door.

Upon thus getting orders Lil Artha and Toby began to immediately make all the noise they could. They pounded on the door with their fists, together with the butt end of Lil Artha's gun; and the jargon of talk they put up was enough to drive any ordinary cat distracted.

Toby even partly opened the door—just a few inches for he did not want to make the acquaintance of that cat at close quarters—and banged it shut again, meanwhile sending a whoop through the slit. It must have been a brave animal that could have stood out against all that combination of sounds.

Through the small opening Toby had glimpsed something that made him have a chilly sensation

along the region of his spine. He had caught sight of the intruder. The cat was an exceptionally large one, and it stood there in the middle of the floor, its hair bristling with fury, and its eyes glaring like yellow balls. No wonder Toby slammed that door so speedily, while his whoop ended in a yell. He almost thought he could hear the heavy thud as the springing cat landed against the door close to his head.

That may have only been his imagination working overtime, and inspired by the one glimpse he had obtained of the fierce beast. He fancied as much himself later on, when in a condition to survey the sequence of events calmly.

While Toby and Lil Artha continued to whoop things up another shrill outcry, this time from George, stilled their clamor.

"Oh! there he is coming out of the chimney, Elmer!" was what George shrieked in his excitement, and afterwards the others laughed when they made mention of the fact that for once George did not seem to doubt the evidence of his eyes, or say that he thought it might be the cat he saw.

"I've got him!" added Uncle Caleb, who doubtless must have managed to work his snapshot camera instantly, though no one heard the "click" of the flying shutter on account of all the other sounds that were arising.

The wildcat had indeed appeared on top of the chimney, having remembered the route it had taken when entering. This alone proved that it

was a clever beast, because in the midst of such excitement many another animal would have lost its head, and gone plunging around the interior, trying to push through the window perhaps, and utterly forgetting that there was such a thing as a vent in that slab and hard mud "smoke chaser," as Lil Artha always called the chimney.

"Look out, Elmer, he's going to jump at you!" warned the tall scout, in a frenzied tone.

A wildcat is possibly one of the most vicious of small beasts of prey to be found in American forests. It will often attack a hunter without any seeming provocation, although doubtless there is some reason for the reckless act, such as hidden kittens near by, or consuming hunger.

In this particular case neither of these reasons would apply, but the animal was enraged on account of being disturbed while eating, and then badgered by those yells on the part of the two scouts, as well as their banging of the cabin door. George afterwards told them that they could hardly blame the poor cat for getting its back up when abused and shouted at in such a way; he also said that if he happened to be a wild beast he would certainly be "mad clear through, and ready to fight at the drop of the hat."

Elmer was on the alert, not that he had really anticipated such a thing as having the wildcat spring at him, but he knew enough about such animals to be aware of their fickle temper, and that one is never to be trusted within leaping range. An old hunter had once told him never under any

possibility to lower his gun when a bobcat was facing him, because their spring is like a flash of lightning. And as we happen to know, Elmer was a boy who always believed in the efficiency of the scout's motto, "Be Prepared!"

The cat crouched there on the top of the chimney for just three seconds. That was the time when Uncle Caleb managed to press the button, and get his picture. It was also when Lil Artha sent out his shrill warning, and at the same time swung his Marlin gun around so that the stock rested against his shoulder.

Then the wildcat sprang, with every powerful muscle in play—sprang straight toward the little group of three—George, Elmer and Uncle Caleb!

George was unarmed and being a cautious fellow he knew that the best thing for him to do was to get out of range as speedily as possible.

Accordingly his movement was exactly timed with that of the leaping cat; for just as the animal quitted the apex of the short chimney, and launched its agile body into the air, George fell flat on his face on the ground and made himself as small as possible.

There sounded a double report. Both Elmer and Lil Artha had fired so near the same time that until told differently later on, George supposed that the scout master alone had made use of his ready gun.

Uncle Caleb knew considerable about these savage cats, and he jumped aside even as the roar of the guns sounded. Elmer, too, had no sooner

pulled the trigger than he took a quick step to the right, and then held his gun ready to make use of the other barrel if necessary.

It turned out that such a thing was not needed. Halted in midair by the double charge of shot, which at such close range must have had the same tearing effect as so many bullets, the wildcat fell with a heavy thud to the ground, some five feet away from where Elmer stood. He instantly covered the beast with his gun.

"No need of another shot, my boy!" cried the owner of the cabin, hastily; "you've already settled him handsomely."

The wretched invader had indeed paid the penalty for his crimes, and all because he possessed such a terrible temper. Had he been willing to jump in the other direction the chances were nothing would have been done to prevent his escape, so that he might furnish Uncle Caleb with other opportunities to snap him off when in the act perhaps of devouring a partridge he had captured in the snow forest. When he allowed his fury to get the better of his discretion he made the one mistake of his life.

All of them gathered around the now dead wildcat to admire his size, and comment on his recklessness in daring to attack a party of human beings.

"Did you ever hear of such nerve in all your life?" remarked Lil Artha, who was grinning all over with the satisfaction it gave him to be instrumental in disposing of such a pest of the woods.

"Why, if there had been a regiment I reckon he'd have jumped at 'em just the same. Mebbe cats go mad sometimes, and just don't know what they're doing."

"I've known of similar cases before," remarked Uncle Caleb, who was looking at the wretched beast rather sadly, Elmer thought, "and a hunter who has had experience never trusts a cat further than he can see it. They get those crazy freaks once in a while, and fear seems to be driven out of their system. When a Malay or a Chinaman loses his head, and starts to wipe out the whole town, they say he is 'running amuck,' and they always shoot him down as they would a mad dog. This cat species when rendered furious does the same thing, and hesitates at nothing. But I'm sorry it had to be done. He was a splendid specimen of a wildcat. Look at those powerful muscles, and see what a square head he has. I'd have given considerable to have had him a little more sociable, so that I might have snapped off several pictures showing how he secured his food, and crept up on game. But it couldn't be helped, apparently; he just had to go and commit suicide as it seemed. And, Elmer, you certainly pulled a quick trigger."

"Half the credit goes to Lil Artha, for he fired at the same time," Elmer quickly admitted. "I'm sure both of us hit him, because you can see how badly the pelt is cut up. It would never bring ten cents in the market after that riddling."

"Is it possible that there were two shots, and

I never suspected it?" Uncle Caleb observed, turning on the tall scout with a smile. "Well, I can easily see that you boys have long ago learned how to take care of yourselves, which is one of the best things any lad can know. All of which increases my desire to hear more about this organization that is doing such wonders for our American lads."

"Do you think you got your picture of the cat, Uncle?" asked Toby. "I heard you call out something or other about it."

"I pressed the button while he was squatting on the top of the chimney," the owner of the cabin went on to say, "and that should be a fine picture. Then almost mechanically I turned the screw that brought another section of film into play, and my recollection is that I snapped off another shot even as the beast was in the air. I'm curious to know if I got anything worth while with that one. It would be a great triumph if I should develop the film and find that I'd caught the cat just as it received your shots and crumpled up in midair."

"That would be something worth seeing, sir," Lil Artha told him, "and we'll hope it turns out that way."

George had scrambled to his feet as soon as he realized that the danger was over. He looked a little ashamed, but there was no occasion for feeling that way. When any one is unarmed, and sees such a fury as that wildcat certainly was coming in his direction, he would be foolish indeed

not to dodge, and even hug the ground in an effort to escape contact with those cruel poisonous claws.

"Gee whiz! look at the sharp teeth, would you; and then those open claws," Lil Artha continued, as he bent down and took one of the dead cat's feet in his fingers; "excuse me from meeting up with such a crazy customer when walking through the woods at sundown. I might manage to get the best of the beast, but my bully khaki suit would be in ribbons, and mebbe my face clawed into a map of Ireland."

"As for me," spoke up Toby, "I'd never feel easy if I knew such a terror was always hanging around, watching for a chance to grab me when my back was turned. And say what you will, Uncle Caleb, I'm tickled half to death because we bagged your pet cat before he had a chance to mark any of us. I tell you I'll enjoy my tramps around this section better after this. If he'd got away you wouldn't have caught Tobias Ellsworth Jones wandering fifty feet away from home base without carrying a club or a gun along. His room is going to be a whole sight better than his company."

Uncle Caleb smiled at hearing what his nephew thought.

"Perhaps you're right in saying that, Toby," he remarked, "and it may be that in pursuing my pet hobby I'm going too much to extremes in wanting to preserve the life of such a savage animal. Possibly your ending his career of piracy may be the means of saving me from a very unpleasant

experience; for I was planning to push my campaign against this same cat, and follow him into his den, to get a good flashlight picture of what he looked like at home. It would have been a fool-hardy experiment, I begin to realize. I suppose it's all for the best, and I'll cure the skin just to remember the adventure by."

Lil Artha, who had pushed up close to Elmer, managed to say in a low tone:

"I reckon that it was you knocked the stuffing out of the beast, Elmer, because I'm afraid I fired too low." But the scout master immediately hushed him up, and told him never to mention it again, for he felt sure both of them had made a hit.

CHAPTER XII.

SCOUTS IN CLOVER .

“THERE used to be a time,” Uncle Caleb went on to remark, as he lifted the heavy wildcat, and started toward the door of his cabin, “when I was considered quite a sportsman. I took every opportunity I could to be in the woods and on the water, shooting deer, quail, partridge, snipe, ducks, geese, brant and all such things, for my fancy seemed to run more in the line of small game than grizzly bears or lions, tigers, elephants and the like. But years ago I began to notice a change gradually taking place in my feelings. I suppose many men find the same thing working when they grow older, and the fires of youth are spent. I began to dislike taking life of any sort, and recently I have allowed many a fine chance to make a bag slip by, because I would sooner snap off a picture, and live on canned goods supplied from the store.”

Of course none of the boys could fully understand this sentiment. They viewed it from the standpoint of youth, and would never know any different until they too grew old, and their hunting instincts became mellowed.

At the same time they could respect such hu-

mane motives, and understand something of the peculiar fascination that taking pictures of wild animals in their native haunts was apt to entail.

"Now to see what a mess the creature may have made of my little cabin home," Uncle Caleb went on to say, as he flung open the door and entered, leaving the body of the late trespasser outside to be attended to later.

The scouts crowded in after him, and looked eagerly around. They found that the cabin in the snow forest was quite a neat affair. Evidently the occupant had gone to considerable trouble and expense to make it comfortable. As he expected to spend most of his time here under this roof, Uncle Caleb believed in having things to suit him, even to a little bathroom off the back, which in summer was supplied with running water from a spring on higher ground, and fed through a sunken pipe, now disconnected on account of the freezing temperature that would have speedily burst it.

There were a couple of bunks built into the walls on either side of the big fireplace, which latter came out several feet into the room. Besides this there was a cot that was also a settee in the daytime, a large table, several comfortable seats that were along the type of the Morris chair Elmer had in his den at home, and various cases of books, curiosities and such things.

Upon the floor were a number of real imported small rugs that Uncle Caleb must have brought from the Orient himself. The boys thought them

rather odd, though at the same time pretty; but they were later on staggered when they learned the history of each little carpet, and what a vast sum Uncle Caleb had paid for them in his rôle of collector.

Taken in all, the interior of that cabin was about as far from resembling the average hunter's home as anything could be. Immediately Lil Artha quit calling it the "shack," because forever afterwards with that cheery interior it would appeal more to him in the garb of a miniature palace.

Uncle Caleb was a rich bachelor, and he liked to be comfortable. Besides, he was a man of science, and a student, rather than a hunter; so they concluded that he was quite right in making his little home look so pleasant.

Just then, however, things were in something of an upset condition. The hungry cat in prowling around and searching for something to eat had upset a number of articles, broken a pet dish of the cabin's owner; while there on the table was the partly gnawed strip of bacon at which the animal had been busily at work when interrupted by their arrival on the scene.

"I can save the better part of it," said the easy-going Uncle Caleb, "and besides, there is plenty more in the locker, for I lay in my winter's stock long before the first real snow comes, so as not to be bothered later on by trips to the town where I trade, which is many miles away from here."

When later on he showed them his "strong room" where his stores were kept George in particular was noticed to lick his lips with a satisfied smile on his face as if telling himself that there need be no fear of hunger so long as they stayed with Uncle Caleb.

"Choose your bunks, boys," they were speedily told, "and toss your blankets in the ones you select. It seems that you figured pretty closely, because if there had been another scout in the party we'd have had to get busy building a new bed. As it is, there is one apiece all around."

"But how about you, Uncle?" asked Toby, solicitously; "we don't want to push you out of your regular bed. Let me sleep on that cot."

"No, I prefer to take it," the owner of the cabin replied; "in fact, as a rule I have slept on the cot winters, because I can pull it up in front of the fire on nights that are particularly bitter."

"You must get some howlers up here, sir, I should think," suggested Elmer.

"Along in January we often have a terrible storm or blizzard, when it's utterly unsafe to venture outside the door, because one can never see ten feet away. Men have been found frozen to death close to their own cabins, which they did not dream were so close by when they gave up in despair. The storm that just visited us was pretty severe, but not to be compared with some I have seen."

"George, take your pick of bunks," said Elmer. Perhaps he allowed George to have the first say

because of the other's notorious habit of grumbling; the wise scout master did not want to give him any chance to complain that he had not been treated fairly and squarely.

Now George was not so greedy but that he could feel ashamed. He seemed to scent the true reason why Elmer was so kind, for a flush came over his face, and he actually shook his head in a decided negative.

"That isn't just fair to the rest, Elmer, and I won't have it," he said, with a show of spirit. "The bunks are all built alike, but one may be better than the others, 'specially of a cold night. Now I tell you how we'll fix that up fine and dandy; I'll mark them by numbers up to four; then I'll write that many on pieces of paper and we'll put them in a hat. Each one draws one out, and in that way gets his bunk without any favoritism being shown. What d'ye say to that, Elmer?"

"Just as you like, George; and I want to tell you I admire the independent spirit you display when you refuse to be favored above the rest. That's the right way to show what you're made of. It speaks well for the regard you have toward others."

While Elmer was saying this George drew out a lead pencil stub and made a figure on the front of each bunk, running from one to four. Then he did the little numbering on as many small squares of paper torn from his notebook. These latter he threw into a hat and held it so no one could look

in, though a hand might be inserted through the small opening.

"Elmer, you draw first!" George went on to say, as he held the hat out to each one of the others in turn.

So the scout master accommodated him, and found that he had hit upon one of the lower bunks. Toby got the upper, and Lil Artha drew the other elevated bed; so that after all George was given the pick of the lot. No one could ever begrudge him his good luck, now that he had shown such a fair spirit.

"It hit me about right," admitted Lil Artha, as he stood up alongside the wall, and flung his blanket inside the second upper bunk, "because Nature always intended that I should nest high, when She gave me this pair of stilts. Lucky you made the bunks over six feet long, Uncle Caleb, or I'd never have been able to turn over without drawing my knees up to my chin. It gives me a pain whenever I think that I may go on stretching out for nearly four years yet. My folks think of cutting the doors higher in our house. They get tired of seeing me duck my head every time I come into a room."

A fire was soon built up in the open space under the chimney flue which the cunning wildcat had used as a means for entering and leaving the cabin. At the time there happened to be little heat among the ashes, for the owner was averse to leaving a fire when he went away for hours, lest he return only to find a blackened heap where

his cabin with its many precious treasures had stood.

It was like a picnic to cook when there were so many conveniences, and Lil Artha, who insisted on helping George, called attention to the excellent iron frame which was intended to be placed over the fire, and serve to hold such cooking vessels as were needed in the preparation of the meal.

Besides this there was a portable oven which made splendid biscuits and bread, as the boys learned later on, when Uncle Caleb showed them how he lived while keeping bachelor's hall alone in that wilderness, days, weeks and months at a time. He had a small barrel of flour in his storeroom, with such a collection of canned goods and dried as well as smoked meats, that George declared it looked like a young grocery store to him; and privately admitted that he would not care very much if they had been booked to stay the balance of the winter with Uncle Caleb, instead of just a few days. He could see all manner of "good times" in that delightful storeroom collection.

They had a light lunch, as the old scientist usually preferred to eat his one heavy meal in the evening, after his thinking was done for the day.

"Make yourselves quite at home, boys," he told them, with a sincerity that even skeptical George could not question; "everything I have is at your disposal. You will find hosts of things to interest you among my collection of curios, and the myriads of pictures I have taken the last seven

years. Some of them have been honored by being published in a geographic magazine, and excited considerable interest among a certain class of scientists. I'm ready to answer every question you can ask, and it will give me the greatest pleasure imaginable to be of service to you. All I seek in return is full confidence; you must tell me all about what scouts do, and learn, and aim to accomplish; also what adventures you may have encountered in carrying out these organization principles."

During the rest of that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon the boys manifested no desire to wander through the white forest, but stayed indoors looking at the many interesting things owned by Uncle Caleb, many of which he had picked up in various quarters and corners of the world, for he had been a famous traveler in his day.

They almost talked themselves hoarse, asking questions, and explaining all about what duties and obligations a boy takes upon his shoulders when he subscribes to the scout promise, and assumes the responsibilities accompanying such a service.

Uncle Caleb had about everything that money could purchase in connection with his photographic fad; and among other things a daylight tank for developing the films.

As he was very anxious to find out whether the snapshots taken of the wildcat on the cabin chimney would turn out to be worth anything, he proceeded to develop the films that afternoon.

When he held them up after washing, and let the boys see the result they were loud in their declarations that he had really done himself proud.

There was the one with the big cat crouching on the chimney-top, and giving all the detail that could be desired. The other was not quite so clear, but it seemed that he must have aimed the camera just right, and pressed the button while the leaping animal was in midair, just crumpling up under the two charges of shot received from separate quarters. This last was a thrilling picture, and ought to make a fine print.

"They'll be a splendid addition to my collection," Uncle Caleb told the boys, as he surveyed his prizes with kindling eyes; "I've got a good many strange pictures but I expect these will top the list. I'll print a copy for each one of you to carry home when you go, because in a measure that is your cat, as well as mine."

Taken in all, they would never be apt to forget that same afternoon. Their genial host seemed to be so delighted to have such a wideawake pack of boys up there with him, that he could not do too much for them. Many were the yarns he spun connected with his nomadic life under different suns; and since settling down to this peculiar state of existence he had known a multitude of adventures, both great and small.

"Right now," he told them, as the afternoon light began to fade with the drawing near of the time for sunset, "you might say I am a marked man; not that it gives me any great amount of

concern, because I hardly believe that Zack Arnold will ever get his courage up to the sticking point, and attempt to carry out the wild threats he made against me."

"I remember hearing a man speaking that name on the train when we were nearing your station, Uncle!" exclaimed Toby; "he talked as though the fellow might be a sort of woods guide, though a tough rascal feared by every one, even the game wardens, who were afraid to try and arrest him for shooting game out of season."

"All of which is about as true as it can be," was the reply. "Six months ago I had the misfortune to run foul of this same Zack. He was even then half under the influence of liquor, and very abusive. I could have stood it for myself, but when the big brute raised his hand, and knocked down a half-grown girl who had chanced to stumble, and fall against him, in the store, it was too much for my blood."

"You gave him what he deserved, didn't you, Uncle?" demanded the exultant Toby.

"Well, I knocked him down three times in succession, for he had come at me with a knife the second and third times. After that he lay there, and was counted out. Now I was never proud of having upset a brawling bully like that when half-seas over, but it had to be done to pay him for striking that poor child. I heard afterwards that he was furious at me, and vowed he would get even, if he had to come all the way up here to where I held out, and settle his debt."

The boys exchanged looks.

"But he might take a sudden notion to visit you, when feeling in a particularly ugly mood, Uncle," Toby remarked, soberly, "and no one would ever know who had set your cabin on fire, and perhaps burned you in the same."

"Well, I thought of that and for a time never went outside these walls without carrying a gun along; but months have passed, and he does not show up, which I take it means he is too big a coward to risk his ears trying to do me an ill turn. And of late I've neglected any of those precautions. When first I saw my fox trap had been tampered with, and that valuable prize taken, I thought of what Zack Arnold had sworn, and was sure it must be his work. But let's forget about such an unpleasant subject, and have a little music for a change."

It seemed that among his many other accomplishments Uncle Caleb was something of a musician; that is, he loved music, and could play very well on a banjo, as well as on a guitar. The boys had found this out, through Toby, and looked forward to having good times listening to their genial host during evenings, as they sat before a crackling fire, and cared not for the weather without.

It was getting pretty sharp again, as George announced after coming in with an armful of wood; but little they cared, with such comfortable quarters, and plenty to eat in the family cupboard.

As if to dismiss an unpleasant subject from his mind Uncle Caleb started in to amuse his young

guests with various popular selections, most of which the scouts knew as well as they did their own names. From these he presently drifted to older airs from the operas, and sentimental serenades that afforded the boys considerable pleasure. In the end he played a few such favorites as "Home, Sweet Home," with so much effect that he had one or two of them secretly winking rapidly in order to keep the tears from filling their eyes.

"Come, we've had enough of this for the present," said the player, suddenly, on catching sight of Toby blowing his nose with great vehemence, "and as it's getting dark outside, suppose we start our preparations for supper. I've got a few wrinkles I'd like to show you, although I rather expect some of you boys will turn out such good cooks that you'll make my little efforts look primitive."

All the same they did not. Uncle Caleb excelled in nearly everything he undertook, from science, music, and photographing wild animals in their native haunts, all the way down to cookery—perhaps George and Toby and Lil Arthur might object to using that word, and on their own account say "*up* to cookery."

At any rate he certainly gave the scouts a supper they would not soon forget; and they admitted in private afterwards that they must look to their laurels if they did not want to be considered "back numbers." Uncle Caleb had done his own cooking for a good many years, and being of an investi-

gating turn of mind, had not been content to go along beaten paths, like most bachelors left to their own devices, but had studied cook-books, and made a success of many fine recipes.

After the meal was over, and things cleaned up, they gathered before the burning logs, and looked forward to an enjoyable evening. Every one was to have a part in entertaining the company, with story or song, as the case might be; and Elmer had a long list of questions which he wanted answers for, mostly pertaining to the habits of the little woods and swamps animals in which Uncle Caleb had become so vitally interested.

Before they could get fully settled down, however, there was a shuffling sound heard at the door, and then came a hesitating sort of knock from without.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OBJECT LESSON

"WASN'T that a knock?" asked George, who apparently had not heard the sound so plainly as the others.

"Seemed like it to me," replied Toby, "but say, neighbors can't be so plenty up here in the woods, to have one running in after supper for enough coffee to last over breakfast. P'raps, after all, it was only a limb scraping against the roof; or a squirrel up in the loft huntin' nuts Uncle's laid away."

"It is some one at the door!" remarked the owner of the cabin, quietly.

Elmer saw him getting to his feet. There was a sparkle in the eyes of Uncle Caleb; and his jaw seemed set in a determined way. This suddenly caused Elmer to remember what had been recently told about the tough hard-drinking guide who believed he had a grudge against the old scientist—Uncle Caleb.

"Let me go to the door for you, Uncle Caleb," said Elmer, hurriedly.

"It is my cabin, son, and therefore my duty to answer any summons," was the steady reply of the old gentleman; "so please stay where you are, unless I need any assistance."

"Great governor! what if it should be *that man?*" Lil Artha was heard to mutter as he reached out a hand, and clutched his own Marlin, which chanced to be standing in a corner conveniently near by.

Every one fairly held his breath as Uncle Caleb was seen to move toward the door. He had not thought it worth while to arm himself, and Elmer considered this positive evidence, going to prove the other's bravery. He himself hardly knew what to expect, and his whole frame fairly quivered with a mixture of eagerness and dread as he saw the owner of the cabin start to open the door, which had been secured by a simple old-fashioned bar that fell into a brace of sockets, one on either side.

Immediately the barrier was removed they saw a figure stagger into view. Uncle Caleb stretched out his hand, and took hold of it. Then the sound of muttered words came to their ears, after which the old gentleman turned, closed the door, and led his unexpected guest toward the fire.

The staring scouts saw that this was a very large man. He seemed to be coarsely dressed as might a woods guide, wearing a heavy sweater under his outer coat. No weapons were visible, and one of his arms hung limply at his side as though it might have been broken in some sort of accident.

The man's face was distorted by pain, but they could see that it was bearded, and looked bearish. In fact, every one of the boys' first impression

was that they would not care to meet this fellow while wandering through some lonely part of the forest, and do anything calculated to excite his anger; for he appeared to be a man with a violent temper.

"It's *him*, I just bet you, Elmer!" whispered Lil Artha in the scout master's ear and Elmer nodded as though he fully agreed with the other.

There seemed to be no need to mention names, for the memory of what Uncle Caleb had recently told them was fresh in every fellow's mind. Curiously they watched what was going on. Lil Artha still caressed his gun. He had hardly made up his mind whether or not this might be a clever trick on the part of Zack Arnold, calculated to gain him an entrance to the cabin of the man he hated so bitterly, though without any reasonably just cause.

It was only the other day that Lil Artha had been reading in school of the wooden horse which played such an important part in the capture of Troy in olden times, being filled with the enemy, who, issuing forth in the night-time, opened the gates of the fortified city to their allies without. Perhaps that was what made the boy suspect the visitor might be shamming in order to catch Uncle Caleb off his guard.

But if this idea had seized hold of Lil Artha he soon realized its utter absurdity. Men may go to considerable lengths in order to carry out their schemes; but he certainly did not believe even a determined fellow like Zack Arnold would deliber-

ately break his arm in the effort to divert suspicion.

It was an ugly break, too, as was shown as soon as Uncle Caleb had divested the other of his garments, with the assistance of Elmer, who sprang to his side when he realized what was needed. That thick, hairy arm was covered with blood, and the sight of it made Toby and George shudder.

"Get a kettle of water on the fire in a hurry, please!" said Uncle Caleb, "because the first thing to be done is to wash this arm so we can see how to set the bone. Toby, at the same time start that coffee to going again, will you? A few hot drinks would take some of the chill out of this poor fellow. He's had a terrible tumble, and is covered with bruises, besides this broken arm. But we'll fix him up as comfortable as we can; and he luckily managed to get to my cabin before it was too late!"

While the old gentleman was speaking in this way the keen black eyes of Zack Arnold kept following his every move. Elmer wondered what must be passing through the mind of the vindictive man just then. He did not doubt in the least but what some terrible plan to revenge himself upon Uncle Caleb for what the other had done to him on that previous occasion had been the cause for his coming to this particular region, for his own camping grounds lay many miles away to the west, where sportsmen congregated in the season for either fly fishing or deer hunting.

With some black plan in his mind the man had

started to even up his score with Uncle Caleb; but a strange fate had caused him to meet with a terrible accident; and now he was compelled to actually seek shelter and assistance from the very man he had been about to injure.

It was a remarkable freak of fate, and Elmer found himself wondering what the outcome of it all might be.

Lil Artha had quietly replaced his Marlin in the corner when he first glimpsed that tortured arm, for he realized then that there was going to be no need of weapons. When Uncle Caleb called for a kettle of warm water he was the first to leap to his feet and place one on the fire; while Toby, just as eager to help, began to brew the coffee.

This latter was ready even before the kettle began to sing, and Uncle Caleb himself poured a brimming cup of the beverage, which he handed to the wounded man. No doubt Zack Arnold needed some stimulant the worst kind. He must have exhausted his pet flask on the way, for he did not seem to have a drop about him; and when the fragrant Java beverage was placed in his possession he swallowed the contents of the big aluminum cup in great gulps, as though his throat might be made of cast iron, which no hot stuff could scald.

Uncle Caleb asked no questions. He must know very well what had brought this revengeful guide so far out of his beaten track; but to see him tenderly washing that arm, and then gently setting the broken bones, after which he bound it up with a splint almost as well as any professional surgeon

could, you might have thought he was attending his best friend instead of a bitter enemy.

Lil Artha could hardly keep his eyes off the man's face. He, too, had finally managed to grasp the same idea that had come long before to Elmer; and now he wondered again and again what the outcome of this remarkable adventure was going to be. He even chuckled a little to himself as he saw those eyes of Zack following Uncle Caleb back and forth, as the other went to get more bandages, or it might be the soothing salve which he wished to rub upon several ugly black-and-blue spots visible on the left side of the brawny woodsman.

"Huh! I've heard before about heaping coals of fire on your enemy's head," Lil Artha whispered to Elmer, when he found a good chance, "but I never just understood what it meant. Now I know to a fraction. Say, did you ever hear of such a queer thing in all your life? And I bet you he was coming up here to make a lot of trouble for Toby's uncle, too. Well, this is an object lesson for scouts, ain't it, Elmer?"

"Just as you say, Lil Artha, but better not try and talk any more about it. He might hear something you wouldn't want him to. Just keep your eyes and ears open, and you'll be well paid."

So after that the tall scout sat still and kept on the alert. He was enjoying things exceedingly. In fact he could not remember having ever felt such a keen interest in anything before as he did in this coming of Zack Arnold to the cabin of his hated enemy, and under such queer conditions.

When in the end Uncle Caleb finished attending to his injured guest, and with the help of Elmer the guide's sweater had been secured in such fashion that it gave him the required warmth, he seemed to remember something else looking to the comfort of Zack Arnold.

"Do you think you could manage to eat something if we cooked it for you, Zack?" he asked, with such an earnest manner that the man writhed in his seat, and his eyes fell in what Lil Artha believed to be utter shame, though he quickly spoke up in reply.

"Ye've made me feel so comfy-like, suh, that I jest reckon I *could* take a few bites. Hain't had nawthin' sence mornin'. Ye see, I took this tumble 'long 'bout noon, an' I lost nigh everything I had with me in the way o' eatin's an' same with the drinkin's. Been jest walkin' ever sence, ahop-in' I mout hold out long enuff ter strike yer shack; but I kim near throwin' up the sponge an' lettin' the freeze do the bizness for me."

George saw a chance to get his hand in had come at last.

"What shall I cook him, Uncle Caleb?" he hastened to ask.

"I've got just two eggs left from the lot I fetched back with me," said the old scientist, without hesitation, "and you can fry them for him with a slice of ham. You'll find the eggs in that can where I keep my rice, the one with the name on the front, George. And there's plenty more coffee in the pot. In his present exhausted condi-

tion it will be the best thing he can take, far better than liquor!"

The guide opened his mouth as though about to say something, but his emotions must have overcome him, for he gulped several times, blinked his eyes quickly, and then sat there staring hard at the fire, possibly with strange thoughts surging through his mind.

Elmer noted these things. He felt that a revolution might be taking place within the soul of that tough woodsman.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," was what Elmer told himself, as he later on watched Zack devouring the supper George had prepared, "but what this is going to turn out to be the making of that man. He's surely seen a great light, and already looks at things in a different way from what he ever did before. And if I know Uncle Caleb, as I think I do from having studied him, the chances are ten to one he'll wait his chance, and all he'll ask in return for what he's done will be for Zack to get on the water wagon, and stay there the rest of his life. Well, I hope it does turn out that way. But who'd ever think we'd run across such a wonderful object lesson away off up here in the snow forest?"

And yet later on, when Elmer allowed himself to survey the matter at closer range, he was not greatly surprised; for he realized that occasions are apt to spring up at the most unexpected times when observing scouts can read a lesson in passing events, if only they keep their wits about them.

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUEER ACTIONS OF ZACK ARNOLD

Room was found for the newcomer later on in the half-circle before the fire, and though Zack Arnold took no part in the conversation, he sat there listening, and hearing things that must have given him many new impressions. As a rule his eyes were fastened upon the beaming and genial face of Uncle Caleb, who, however, made out not to notice this attention he was receiving, though naturally he could not help knowing it.

The boys told their host numerous things connected with the organization of the troop of Boy Scouts in their town, and what wonderful things it had already done for many of those who had signed the muster roll. He was keenly interested, and asked questions so fast that it kept them all busy answering; for Elmer would never consent that his chums simply sit there while he spoke for all; he wished them to have a part in the telling.

On his part, Uncle Caleb related a lot about his life in the past, touching upon some of the remarkable things that had happened to him. Strange as some of these might be reckoned, Elmer was privately of the opinion that nothing more singular could ever have happened to the traveler and

scientist than the dramatic coming to his cabin door on this bitter cold winter's night of one who believed himself to be the old gentleman's enemy, sorely wounded, almost ready to die, and wholly dependant upon Uncle Caleb's bounty for his very life.

When later on some of the scouts manifested signs of drowsiness and exhaustion, by sundry yawns and nods, the host declared it was time they thought of getting some sleep.

"I'd put you on the cot here, Zack," he told the guide, "only it isn't as strong as it might be, and you're rather heavy. If it happened to give way you'd get a bad wrench to that arm of yours that wouldn't be very pleasant. So I'm going to fix you out with a bunk on the floor near the fire. I happen to have some spare blankets, and here are some furs that will make things feel easy for you. I don't suppose you object to sleeping on the floor, do you?"

At that the man grinned, for the first time since entering the cabin.

"Won't be the fust time by a thousand thet I've slept on boards, suh," he went on to say, "an' right hyar I wants to tell ye how much 'bleeged I am ter yer fur all ye done by me. I don't deserve a bit o' the same. I'm a bad man, suh, I been thinkin' all manner o' rotten things 'bout ye, sence ye guv me what I reckons I desarved, if ever a mean skunk did; an' thet's what."

"Don't mention it, Zack," said Uncle Caleb, pleasantly; "I know you looked at things from

the wrong side, and at one time thought I'd done you harm; but since then you've seen a better light; and I wouldn't be surprised if you were coming out of your way to my cabin to tell me so, when this accident happened."

The big guide's jaws worked several times as though he might be trying to say something; but it was of no use, for not a word escaped him. He did heave a deep sigh, however, and gave his kind benefactor a long look before allowing his eyes to drop.

Elmer felt satisfied, for he believed the cure must be working. Indeed, he could not for the life of him understand how any one could withstand friendly advances from such a splendid old gentleman as Uncle Caleb. His very eyes were full of benevolence and the kindly spirit that filled his heart. The man who would take the keenest delight in binding up the broken leg of a poor little rabbit that he found in distress, certainly could not bear malice toward an uneducated woodsman, who had never had half a chance to learn better things than entertaining an unreasonable desire for revenge.

Under the direction of the owner of the cabin Lil Artha made up a mighty comfortable bed on the floor. When it was finished the scout tested his work, and declared he would not mind sleeping there all the rest of his stay, if Uncle Caleb thought one of the bunks would be better for the wounded guide.

Zack, however, would not hear of it. He de-

clared that he preferred the floor for many reasons. Lil Artha managed to shoot a suggestive look toward Elmer, upon which the other shook his head in the negative. He knew that the lengthy scout suspected Zack might be thinking of taking French leave while they slept, and perhaps help himself to some of their stores in the bargain. But Elmer had no such fear.

When the boys started to crawl into their respective bunks, partly undressing, although none of them had dreamed of bringing their pajamas along on this wintry expedition, Zack appeared to be asleep. At least he lay there bundled up, and seemed to be breathing heavily.

Lil Artha, when he thought he was not noticed, managed to deftly move his Marlin gun closer to the bunk into which he meant to clamber presently. He acted as if he more than half suspected he might find occasion to make some sort of use of the weapon before dawn broke again.

But Elmer had seen him; indeed, it was very little that ever eluded those wideawake eyes of the scout master, when out with his chums. He managed to get a chance to whisper with Lil Artha when the others were busily engaged making their sleeping quarters ready.

"I'd be mighty slow to think of using that gun, if I were you, Lil Artha," he suggested.

The lengthy scout flushed a little, and looked somewhat confused.

"I might have known you'd glimpse me doin' that same, Elmer," he confessed, "but when a

wildecat comes down our chimney what's to hinder its mate from doin' likewise? And if a fellow was waked up in the night to find that a ferocious critter had taken possession of our bungalow, why, a gun'd be a good asset, believe me."

Elmer looked at him, and then smiled grimly.

"Oh! well, if that's what you've got troubling you, it's all right, Lil Artha," he went on to say, meaningly. "I kind of imagined you were thinking of something else. And if some one should take a notion to skip out, remember it's no business of yours. We wouldn't want to detain any one against his will."

"Sure, I didn't mean to try to," acknowledged the tall scout, " 'less, f'r instance, he tried to loot the whole shebang, when I'd think it my duty to cover him, and then call Uncle Caleb."

"I don't think you'll find any need of doing that, Lil Artha," continued Elmer; "fact is, all the signs point just the other way."

"Hope so," grunted his chum; and this was all that passed between them.

Later on the cabin became quiet, except for the heavy breathing of those who were sound asleep. Elmer dozed. Somehow, although he was desperately sleepy, he did not appear to be able to lose himself for more than brief intervals at a stretch.

Perhaps it was his strange surroundings, although Elmer could hardly believe such to be the case, for past experiences were against it. He could remember sleeping soundly on more than a few occasions when danger threatened; he had

helped guard the saddle band of horses on his uncle's ranch when rustlers in the shape of horse thieves were operating all through the vicinity; and on being given a chance to snatch an hour's sleep had lost himself as soon as his head touched the ground.

The wind moaned through the branches of the trees without. Now and then Elmer believed that he could hear faint sounds that might proceed from certain of the four-footed denizens of that great snow forest around them, possibly searching for food while the night lasted, since they hugged their dens in the daytime.

Once he saw Lil Artha thrust his head out from his bunk, and stare at the figure bundled up in those blankets on the floor. This told the scout master that Lil Artha had not been able to quite get over the suspicions he had formed, and which Elmer believed to be wholly unwarranted.

It must have been long after midnight when Elmer, chancing to once more awaken, on glancing out from his bunk saw that Zack Arnold was no longer lying there on his well side, and wrapped in sleep.

The revengeful guide was now sitting up. He seemed to be intently listening, as though to either discover whether all of the others were sound asleep, or else trying to catch some signal from without.

A dreadful thought flashed into Elmer's mind, though he quickly dismissed it as unreasonable. It was of course possible that Zack may have

coaxed others to accompany him on his mission of revenge; but if he had company why should he appeal to his bitter enemy when in desperate need of succor? That alone stamped the idea as next door to absurd; and so Elmer put it out of his mind as impossible.

At the same time the actions of the guide were certainly queer, to say the very least of it. He was now getting slowly and painfully to his feet, repressing a groan while so doing; because with one arm tied up and useless it is not always the easiest thing in the world to get up off the floor, and out from a mess of clinging blankets.

Once he was on his feet the actions of the man became even more suspicious. He crept toward the door, turning his head several times as though to make sure that no one was watching him. Here he fumbled for a brief time, managing presently to take aside the bar. Then he gently opened the door, and as the wind was from the north, and the opening faced the south, the cold air did not enter when he had done this.

Elmer, still watching, half expected to see the guide step out and depart. He was even debating with himself as to whether his duty might not compel him to raise his voice in protest against such an act, since the chances were the man would not be able to survive the exposure in his present weakened condition, without his rifle, and with no food to sustain him.

He saw that Lil Artha had that long neck of his "rubbering," as he himself would have termed it;

doubtless his gun was alongside him in the bunk, and even then he had hold of it.

To the astonishment of Elmer, however, the man did not pass beyond the doorsill. He seemed to have drawn some object from a hidden receptacle about his person, where it must have escaped observation when his benefactors were helping him. And giving this a swift toss Zack Arnold hurled it far out amidst the snow drifts; after which he backed into the cabin, softly closed the door, glanced hurriedly around to see if he had been observed, but seeing nothing, because Lil Artha had hastily drawn his head back as might a cautious old tortoise when threatened with peril; after which the guide replaced the bar.

Five minutes after all this queer happening had taken place Zack was once more bundled up in his blankets, and apparently bound to go to sleep, this time in real earnest.

After that Elmer seemed to find no difficulty whatever in getting asleep himself. Why, it really seemed as though a great load had been removed from his mind; and the first thing he knew George was calling him to get up, because breakfast was almost ready.

It was a most unusual thing for the scout master to over-sleep. Some of the others, notably Toby and George, joked him about it; but Elmer noticed that Lil Artha did not say a word.

Later on, after they had all partaken of the fine meal that George prepared, he doing his level best to show Uncle Caleb that there were other cooks

as well, Elmer caught Lil Artha making certain gestures in his direction. He could manage to guess what it all meant, and believed the other wanted a chance to talk with him outside.

"I wonder what the weather promises for to-day; and I think I'll step out to see how things look," Elmer presently remarked carelessly.

"I'll go along and give you the benefit of my vast experience as a weather prophet!" exclaimed Lil Artha, jumping up; "the rest of you stay inside, because too many cooks spoil the broth, and two of us ought to be enough to settle this job with the clerk of the weather."

It happened that George was still busy with some of his dishes, about which he saw Uncle Caleb was unusually particular, in that he used two separate waters in washing the same; while Toby was busily employed in looking over some traps he had discovered hanging from a nail, and evidently seldom used; so that neither of them dreamed of leaving the comfortable cabin, and braving the outside air just then.

"What's all this about, Lil Artha?" demanded the scout master, after the door had been carefully closed behind them.

"Why, I happened to know that you saw that ugly looking guide moving around in the middle of the night, Elmer; and I thought you must have noticed that he threw something away when he was standing there in the doorway?"

"I did see him do that, and I knew you were on the job, too, Lil Artha," Elmer went on to

say; "but if you've made a discovery, hurry up and tell me what it is, because I haven't thought to put my sweater on, and it's pretty chilly here."

"Well, I was that curious to know what it could be the fellow threw away," continued the tall scout, "the first thing this morning, before any of the rest of you had peeped an eye open, I got up, and came out here to look around."

"And did you find anything?" asked Elmer, his own curiosity aroused by now.

"I had to go back and forth a heap before I came on a little hole in a snow drift that looked like something had dropped in there," continued Lil Artha, in a highly mysterious fashion. "So I began to dig down, and pretty soon my hand touched this!"

He thereupon drew something from its place of concealment, and held it up before the eyes of his astonished companion.

"Why, it only looks like a piece of common gaspipe!" exclaimed Elmer.

"Just what it is," Lil Artha went on, in an awed tone; "but say, Elmer, the same is crowded chock full of some sort of stuff that may be dynamite for all I know. It's a sure-enough infernal machine, one of the crude bombs that you read about in the New York papers, such as Italians use when they want to make some rich merchant or banker hand over blackmail money. Look at it yourself, and then you'll know what fetched that skunk of a Zack Arnold up here to this region. He meant to blow Uncle Caleb's cabin to

flinders, that's what he did; and p'raps with the owner inside of the same. Huh! no wonder he didn't want that thing to be discovered on his person! I sure don't blame him a little bit!"

And Elmer, as he examined the miserable contrivance which would explode with so great a power for harm, felt a thrill pass all over his body.

CHAPTER XV

A SCOUT'S EDUCATION

"WHAT do you make of it, Elmer; is it a sure enough bomb?" demanded Lil Artha, whose face was working strangely under the violence of his emotions.

"Looks like it was that, and nothing else," admitted the scout master, slowly, with a wrinkle across his forehead, as though he might be considering weighty matters, as indeed he was just then, for one so young.

"And there can't be any doubt but what he meant to blow up the cabin of the man he forced himself to believe was his enemy, the kindest-hearted gentleman you and the rest of us ever met up with—tell me that, Elmer, didn't he?"

"Hold on, Lil Artha, don't explode!" cautioned Elmer, soothingly. "I understand how you feel about this ugly business. Yes, that must have been the scheme that brought Zack away up here in the dead of winter. Whether he meant to do Uncle Caleb bodily injury or not we've no means of knowing. Let's hope that the limit of his revenge was confined to the destruction of the cabin, and all the valued treasures it held."

"Well, that would be arson, and the law sits down mighty hard on anybody who deliberately, and 'with malice aforethought,' as I've heard my dad say, sets fire to the property of another. He deserves being kicked out, and we'll have to attend to his case, the whole bunch of us."

The excited scout made a quick movement, as though about to rush into the cabin, waving the piece of gas-pipe which had been fashioned into a rude but deadly bomb with a fuse to it; Elmer, however, tightened his grip on his chum's sleeve.

"Wait! Don't be in such a hurry, old fellow. Let's reason this thing out a little before you spill the fat in the fire!" he told Lil Artha, in that quieting voice of his that carried such weight with the other scouts.

"But, Elmer, don't you see he's a regular fire-brand!" urged the tall boy, twisting a little, as though struggling to get loose from the detaining hand; but only in a faint-hearted fashion, because as always the influence of the scout master predominated. "How do we know but what right now he's figuring on doing us all some mean trick? We're friends of Uncle Caleb, and he must look on us as his enemies."

"You forget something, Lil Artha," urged Elmer.

"Oh! yes, in my hurry I'm always forgetting things; but tell me what I've let slip now, Elmer."

"It was yesterday that Zack was heading toward this cabin, breathing all sorts of ugly threats against Uncle Caleb, wasn't it?" Elmer

continued, in that smooth argumentative tone he knew how to use so well, and which as a rule was so wonderfully convincing.

"Why, of course it was, Elmer," admitted the other, weakly, yet curiously.

"And something has happened since then, you know, Lil Artha?"

"Oh! sure, several things," replied the tall scout.

"Zack Arnold had an accident, and found himself facing what might be the end of his evil career," continued Elmer. "Now, life is sweet even to such a man; and he couldn't but feel alarmed at the idea of being frozen in the snow forest, because of his broken arm, and having no way to supply himself with food or fire. Then in his desperation he forgot everything else, and came to the cabin of the man he had been calling his enemy. You know what sort of a reception he got, Lil Artha?"

"You bet I do, Elmer; it couldn't have been warmer if he'd been a life-long comrade of Uncle Caleb!"

"All right, then," the scout master told him, emphatically; "and you can depend on it Zack has had an experience unlike anything he ever ran up against before. I've been watching him, and trying to figure out what might be passing through his brain; and the fact of his throwing this bomb as far away as he could shows that he's heartily ashamed of ever entertaining the notion that Uncle Caleb was an enemy of his."

"Do you really think so, Elmer? And could such a scoundrel ever reform?" asked Lil Artha, half skeptically, just as though he were Doubting George.

"Of course I wouldn't like to stake my reputation on it," Elmer continued; "but all the signs point that way. The man is just now in a daze. He never met with anything like this before, and hardly knows what to make of it. In other words, Lil Artha, he has arrived at the cross-roads, and the next few days will either see him turning over a new leaf, or going back to his old ways again. It must depend pretty much on Uncle Caleb."

"I reckon it will, Elmer!" muttered the tall scout, beginning to drift across the line, and agree with what the other advanced. "And don't you think we ought to let Uncle Caleb know about this gas-pipe thing?"

"Yes, but I don't think it'll make any difference with his way of treating the man. Uncle Caleb has sized Zack up to a dot, and he's trying to get the whip-hand over him by sheer kindness. And I think he will, sooner or later. It wouldn't surprise me if it all ended in Zack turning right-about face, and caring for Uncle Caleb just as much as he thought he hated him. Such men when they do change never make a half-way job of it; they go the whole thing."

"Shall I call Uncle Caleb out here now while we're at it, Elmer?"

"I'll do it, and you wait here," the scout master told him.

"All right, then; you know how to go about it better than I do. I'll be ready to spring my little surprise on our host," said Lil Artha.

So Elmer stepped over, and opening the door quietly, caught the eye of Uncle Caleb, when he crooked his finger. The meaning of this gesture could not well be mistaken, and presently the old scientist joined them outside the cabin, making some excuse as he passed out.

When Lil Artha showed him the queer piece of gas-pipe that had been charged with some high explosive apt to carry great destruction with it when discharged, Uncle Caleb did not appear to be greatly astonished.

"I imagined it might turn out to be something of the sort, boys," he informed the scouts; "and it was my full intention to look around later on, so as to discover what it was Zack threw away last night; for I saw him standing there in the doorway just as both of you seem to have done. You've saved me the trouble of making the search, Lil Artha. But let me hide this ugly thing. I wouldn't like Zack to know it had been found so soon."

"Then you won't turn him out for coming up here on such a terrible errand?" asked Lil Artha, weakly.

Uncle Caleb looked at him, and smiled. Lil Artha understood then what was in the mind of the kindly scientist, who loved his fellow men so well that he could even believe the worst of them must have *some* good in him, however small, if only one

could discover its location, and coax the wavering spark to glow into a steady flame.

"I don't believe Zack ever had a chance," he told them, seriously, "and I'm going to give him one right now, if it's in my power. As scouts, neither of you would surely deny it to him, I'm certain. Besides, it's going to give me considerable pleasure in studying the working of the germ that has been planted in his heart by this piece of good luck. Perhaps that broken arm may mean everything to Zack Arnold. A year from now we'll take stock, and see how things come out. In the meantime say nothing, and leave it all to your Uncle Caleb."

Willingly both boys declared that they were only too glad to do so. They asked, and readily received permission, to tell George and Toby, when a chance came. And as they entered the cabin later on, to see Zack still following Uncle Caleb with his wondering, yes, even admiring glance, it struck the scouts that perhaps the sensible old scientist had made a study of human nature as he had the habits of wild animals, and knew full well what he was doing.

During the balance of that day he treated the wounded man just as though the intruder might be one of the family. Uncle Caleb was too wise to gush over the injured guide; he simply showed Zack that he had a deep interest in his welfare, and meant that he should have every care while unable to look out for himself that could be expended on him.

Elmer, who was observing these things closely, without betraying the fact that he had more than a passing interest in them, told himself that it would not be surprising if when they came to leave the cabin in the forest a pact had been arranged between Uncle Caleb and Zack Arnold, by means of which the big guide was to stay up there the balance of the winter, and act as a side partner to the man he had once been so foolish as to consider his enemy.

"There'll be no chance for him to hobnob with his real enemy, which you can take it from me is strong drink," the scout master told the other boys when they talked matters over, away from the cabin that afternoon; "and before spring comes, I wouldn't be surprised if Uncle Caleb has weaned him from his old habits, so that nothing can ever tempt him to go back to them again."

"I hope you're right, Elmer," ventured George; "I don't feel quite as strong as you do about it, because I just can't, that's what; but it'd be splendid if Uncle Caleb did reform that beast."

"And I think it's just wonderful," Toby admitted, having heard the whole story with great eagerness and interest; "I never knew Uncle Caleb was such a splendid sort of a man. And honest now, I don't see how any fellow could hold out against his winning ways. No wonder Zack keeps watching him all the time; I tell you he's as near hypnotized as anybody could be."

And so they concluded to let the matter rest,

confident that the good man of the lonely cabin in the snow forest knew what he was doing, and that the chances were he was not making any mistake.

The boys now proceeded to enjoy themselves to the best of their ability, each according to his bent. Of course all of them were keenly interested in the remarkable success with which the scientist was meeting in his effort to secure amusing and instructive flashlight pictures of the woods animals at night. He showed them how he set his snares, so cleverly arranged that when the fox or the mink came to take the tempting bait that had been cunningly placed, he was compelled to pull a cord that released the hammer by which the fulminating cap was detonated, and the flashlight cartridge set going, thus causing the little animal to take his own picture.

That very night every one of the four scouts accompanied Uncle Caleb to set several of these ingenious traps. The novel experience appealed to all of them; and even Lil Artha, usually an ardent hunter, was heard to admit that it afforded all the excitement necessary for enjoyment, anticipation and realization combined, without having to destroy the life of the cunning little creatures that, in roaming the woods, and seeking their natural food supplies, were only working out their individual destinies.

"Anyhow," Lil Artha confided to Elmer, later on, when they were returning to the warm cabin where Zack had been left in full charge, "I don't believe I'd like to become a regular fur trapper,

though once on a time I did seem to hanker after such a life. It's all well enough to shoot game when you're hungry, just like you'd knock over a chicken when the dominie is coming to dinner; but this thing of trapping little things like mink and muskrats just for the money their skins bring in the market doesn't strike me as quite right. I'd never see a lady wearing a fur coat again without feeling queer, like all the innocent little animals I'd gone and slaughtered were parading before me. Nixey for mine, I give you my word."

Elmer did not make any reply in words, but the satisfied glance he gave the speaker was eloquent enough. Truth to tell he was well pleased with the change that was working in Lil Artha. At one time the tall scout had shown signs of becoming so infatuated with hunting that quite a savage desire to slay things had begun to manifest itself in his disposition. Already had the mild influence of Uncle Caleb begun to make itself felt.

Zack Arnold would not be the only one benefitted by contact with the owner of the cabin. Some of the scouts would return home with new ideas concerning things. Already Elmer could see where this midwinter holiday trip was going to repay them a dozen-fold for all it cost. He was satisfied with the promising results, and would not have had things different, could the choice be his for the taking.

While they were gone Zack had tidied up the cabin after a rude fashion, considering that he

did not know much about keeping things looking nice in the first place, and had only one arm to work with in the second. But it was the fact that he was beginning to take a decided interest in things that pleased Uncle Caleb, who was not slow to commend his thoughtfulness, and Elmer could see the glow that flashed into the eyes of the big guide, telling that he had already begun to desire to do that which would commend itself to his kind benefactor.

“And it’s going to be all right,” Elmer told himself, as he lay down later in his bunk, watching the two men who were still sitting by the fire, talking about the habits of animals, for Zack having been a guide all his life was brimfull of such lore; “he’s got Zack going, and nothing can stop him now. It must give a fellow a mighty nice feeling to know that he’s changed such a life, and for better things. But if we only knew all that has happened in Uncle Caleb’s past I reckon we’d find that this is just one little incident in a long string.”

And that night neither Elmer nor Lil Artha dreamed of keeping watch because of the presence of so desperate a character as Zack Arnold under the same roof that sheltered them. Indeed, so greatly had their opinions changed that they would have been willing to put considerable trust in the loyalty of the rough guide. His very face did not seem one-half so repulsive, now that it no longer showed the marks of passion and pain. In fact, Elmer could see where in good

time Zack might turn out to be a pretty fair looking sort of a man; for once when he allowed a smile to cross his face he was rather attractive.

So the night wore away, and another day dawned. The boys, knowing that their vacation was moving swiftly along, and feeling that they must crowd everything possible into the few remaining days, had laid out a plan of campaign that would make this a busy period. And Uncle Caleb was ready to join them in any undertaking that had for its object the satisfying of their desire for rollicking fun, or their education along the line of a more intimate acquaintance with the little woods folks in whom he took such a decided interest.

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD-BY TO THE SNOW FOREST

It happened that very afternoon Lil Artha met with an adventure that stirred his red blood at quite a lively rate, and for a little time caused quite a lively excitement around the vicinity of the cabin.

Elmer, Toby and George had gone off with Uncle Caleb to investigate some freak of Nature in which the old scientist was interested. Lil Artha at the time was suffering from a chafed heel, and thought the long walk through the deep snow was more than he cared to undertake; so he had promised to remain home and look after preparations for supper.

As it was too early to think of commencing that job, he had wandered forth for a little stroll, not meaning to go far away from the cabin. Of course such a thing as danger never once appealed to the boy; and with those new thoughts concerning hunting and destroying animal life in possession of his mind, he certainly was not going to shoulder his shotgun, which he had left in a corner of the cabin.

In the midst of his wandering he suddenly heard a strange scratching sound that gave him a

thrill. Looking up in the quarter from which it seemed to come, Lil Artha was astonished to see a pair of yellow eyes glaring down at him, and recognize the gray coat of a ferocious wildcat.

He instantly jumped at the conclusion that this must be the mate of the animal they had killed after it had forced an entrance into the cabin, to steal Uncle Caleb's smoked meat, and then savagely attacked them. Yes, there could be no doubt about it; and the cat was evidently of a mind to spring upon him, and through means of its terrible claws seek to have revenge for the loss of its mate. Some feline instinct doubtless told the beast that this boy must have been concerned in the death of the partner of its joys and sorrows, which we happen to know was the actual truth.

Lil Artha's first thought was to turn and sprint for the safety of the cabin as fast as he could go. Then it struck him as a dangerous thing to turn his back on such a treacherous foe as a wildcat; for there could be no question but what the animal would immediately make its leap, and land on his shoulders.

Lil Artha realized that the best thing for him to do was to keep his face turned toward his four-footed enemy. If only now he could pick up a suitable cudgel he might be able to give a decent account of himself; but to struggle with that terror of the snow forest, with only his bare hands, did not please him at all.

He shot a hasty glance all around him. The snow happened to have blown away in that par-

ticular spot, where one of the boys had been chopping fuel; and there Lil Artha discovered just the sort of stick he believed he could wield to good advantage in keeping his feline foe at bay.

Giving a wild shout, in hopes of alarming the beast more or less, he sprang toward the coveted trophy, with outstretched hand. And when his eager fingers closed about the end of the three-foot club Lil Artha felt considerably better.

It appeared, though, that his work was cut out for him. The cat actually leaped directly for him, and never would the boy forget how terrible the sight of that flying figure passing through space appeared to his excited mind.

By a nimble jump to one side Lil Artha managed to avoid contact with the extended claws of the cat; and the disappointed animal, upon landing in a heap, instantly whirled around and again sprang toward him. This time the boy struck with his club, and managed to knock his assailant over, though the now thoroughly aroused animal seemed more determined to get at him than ever.

So the battle raged, Lil Artha all the while shouting at the top of his lungs, though he hardly knew what for, since his chums and Uncle Caleb were more than a mile distant, and could hardly hear him at best.

He fought with all the dexterity he could command. When he struck at the raging beast he knew that should he manage to make a miss nothing could keep him from having the cat fasten itself on his breast, tearing and biting with fury.

Time and again did he bring that good club against the hairy form of his enemy, and send the wildeat bowling over; but it surely had the nine lives such touch animals are usually credited with, for on every occasion it managed to once more regain its feet, and crippled as it may have been come stubbornly straight at him again.

Lil Artha was getting winded, just as he might have been after knocking a dozen tremendous fousls, when playing in a hotly contested game of baseball. He felt a cold chill pass over him as he began to wonder whether he might not be tired out by this beast that seemed never to know when to give in; and what might not happen then?

Once more he had brought his stick against the creeping cat with such good will that the animal was knocked fully six feet away; but to his despair it immediately recovered, and started back toward him.

Just then Lil Artha heard a loud report, and saw the cat roll over in a heap. As the relieved scout looked in the direction from whence that shot had come he saw Zack Arnold standing there, his face drawn and white with pain; for in handling Lil Artha's gun so as to relieve the boy of his fierce antagonist he must have given his broken arm a severe wrench, that for the moment made him feel sick and faint.

And Lil Artha, seeing how things were, threw an arm about the big guide, weak by reason of his pain, and helped him back to the cabin. After that Lil Artha forgot that he had expressed any

doubt concerning the reformation of Zack Arnold. The guide had proved his change of heart by that action; and it would serve to cement the bonds of the new friendship that had sprung up between him and Uncle Caleb, as well as the old scientist's boyish guests.

Later on, when the others returned from their trip, the boys full of the interesting things they had seen, great was their surprise to hear how Lil Artha had been concerned in a stirring adventure. The report of the gun had been wafted to their ears, but of course they expected that it was only Lil Artha doing a little hunting on his private account near the cabin, though Uncle Caleb did not fancy the boy taking any such liberties with his familiar four-footed friends.

They all had to go out and examine the body of the dead wildcat, remarking that if anything it surpassed its mate in the way of ferocity, and blind recklessness, in attacking a human being without any particular provocation, and in broad daylight at that.

"I'm sorry it had to be," remarked Uncle Caleb, with a sigh, "for I expected to have considerable enjoyment later on in trying to get these cats to play photographer for themselves; but no one is to blame in either instance. If attacked by such a fierce creature I myself would shoot to kill without any hesitation. After its mate was destroyed I suppose this one would never have given me any peace. And at any rate it afforded Zack a chance to prove that he was not ungrateful;

which after all is the best part of the whole affair, barring your escape from being clawed, Lil Artha. Are you sure the claws or teeth of the cat didn't scratch you the least bit, because in that case I'd want to take due precautions. Blood poisoning might set in if the cuts were neglected, all depending on the condition of your own blood."

The tall scout had examined his hands and face thoroughly before the others of the party returned home, for he was not wholly ignorant concerning the possible results that sometimes follow wounds received through carnivorous animals. He knew that Elmer always made it a practice to carry with him a small phial of permanganate of potassium, to be freely used as a wash in such cases, as calculated to cleanse the wound of all foreign matter, and neutralize any poison that might come from contact with claws impregnated with it.

He assured the anxious woodsman that he had escaped even the slightest scratch, and could consider himself especially fortunate, in which the other heartily agreed with him.

Again did they spend another happy evening around the cheery fire. As the flames glowed and crackled they coaxed Uncle Caleb to tell more incidents connected with his explorations in far-away Thibet, when he was the first white man to enter the Forbidden City and interview the Head Llama, whose existence had up to that time been pretty much of a sealed mystery to the civilized world.

Another peaceful night followed, and then came dawn again. This was to be their next to last day in the snow forest, because on the second morning they must prepare to turn their faces toward home again, seek the little station, signal to a passing train, and be carried back to familiar scenes.

In many ways all of them would be sorry when the time for separation arrived; and so they had planned to do divers things during these two days, which it was sincerely hoped would turn out pleasant ones. The weather had moderated, and even a thaw set in late the preceding day, but as the wind whipped around once more into the northwest the surface of the snow became covered with a sheet of ice that was almost thick enough to bear the weight of a small boy.

Toby was wild with eagerness to be shown how to use those wonderful snow-shoes which Uncle Caleb had given him for a present; and so the old woodsman showed him just how to attach them to his toes, so as to leave the balance of the foot free to bend at his will, though really Elmer had explained this thing to Toby before.

Under the guiding care of first Uncle Caleb, and when he grew tired, of Elmer on the old scientist's snow-shoes, Toby was enabled to perform quite creditably, and in the end felt that he knew fairly well how to spin over the ice-crusted drifts in a way that would hardly have shamed those Canadian cousins of his who belonged to the famous Teuque Bleue Snow-shoe Club up in Mon-

treal, and wrote him such glowing accounts of the long trips they took over Mount Royal, and into the bush, in the dead of winter.

The boys had not forgotten how they had been almost reduced to a diet of musquash at the time Lil Artha so fortunately shot his deer; and upon invitation from Elmer, who was genuinely desirous of learning whether the dish could be as palatable as some hunters and Indians declared, Uncle Caleb told them they could get a number of the little animals with the glossy fur, and he himself promised to prepare the stew.

Well, they ate it, and George even came in for a second helping, but on the whole it was the consensus of opinion that they did not really hanker after "musquash," which might please some palates, and serve as a means to ward off actual starvation, but did not seem to appeal to them very strongly. All of which was fortunate indeed for the furry denizens of the marsh, because there would be no further loud calls for a repetition of the dish.

The last day was pretty much taken up with seeing all they could of Uncle Caleb and trying to grasp the results of his labors in the cause of science and natural history. Each of the boys was given a sheaf of prints to carry back with him, many of them most interesting revelations concerning the hidden lives of the four-footed neighbors of Uncle Caleb, whose habits were so little known to the average person. And even George admitted that he would not have missed

what he had learned while up in the great snow forest, with this observing relative of Toby for a good deal. It had broadened his knowledge of many things, and given him a much higher estimate of human nature in seeing how kindness had won the game over an evil desire for revenge.

It was all settled, and Zack Arnold was going to stay there as the side partner of Uncle Caleb. He did not appear like the same man when on that last morning he shook each one of the four scouts by the hand and hoped he would see them again. There was a look on his face that surprised George and Lil Artha, who at one time had expressed themselves so strongly to the effect that they did not believe any good could ever come out of so tough a customer.

"I'll never say that again, as long as I live!" George admitted, later on; "after this I'm going to look for the spark of good in every hard case, instead of only seeing the evil."

"I sure have had a lesson I'll never forget," added Lil Artha; "and when you get right down to facts that Zack Arnold isn't such a bad fellow either. What he don't know about the woods you could put in a thimble; and I can see that after Uncle Caleb has had him with him six months he's going to turn out something more than half-way decent."

Fortunately they did not meet with another snow storm while on the homeward road but on arriving at the little station they had only to await the train. The same little urchin from whom

they had received the false information grinned at them. Lil Artha was for giving him the drubbing he richly deserved; but Elmer counselled differently.

"After all it was a lucky thing he gave us the wrong directions," he told the other scouts. "We have had a whole lot of experiences that would never have come to us otherwise. And then you shot that fine young buck, remember, Lil Artha. So, taking pattern from Uncle Caleb, suppose we wash the incident from the slate."

And what did Lil Artha do but approach the grinning urchin, and actually thank him for the trouble he had taken to direct them, stating that they had had the "time of their lives," and tossing him a silver quarter as a reward for his being so solicitous about their welfare. The last thing they saw as the train carried them away was that country boy standing there, staring at the coin he held in one hand while he scratched his head in perplexity and evidently wondered what it all meant. So Lil Artha had taken a page from the diary of Uncle Caleb, and applied the kind-hearted old scientist's methods to his own case.

The four scouts reached home in safety, and with plenty to interest those of their comrades of the troop who had not been along. It is to be hoped that at some not far distant day in the future we may be permitted to chronicle still further of the happenings that came the way of Elmer, Toby, Lil Artha, George, and others belonging to the Hickory Ridge Troop of Boy Scouts.

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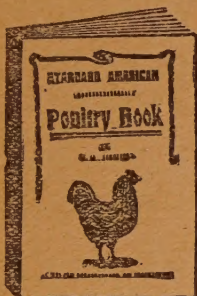
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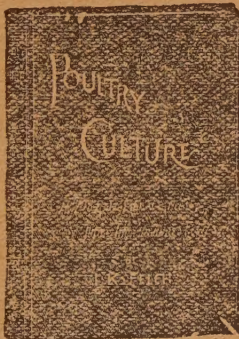
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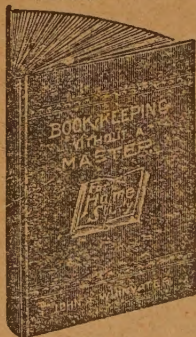
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